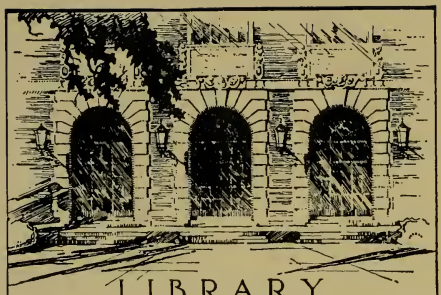


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Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.



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AN ISLE OF SURREY.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF

'THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE DUKE'S SWEETHEART,"
"UNDER ST. PAUL'S," "MIRACLE GOLD," ETC.

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AN ISLE OF SURREY.

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CHAPTER I.

WELFORD BRIDGE.

There was not a cloud in the heavens. The sun lay low in the west. The eastern sky of a May evening was growing from blue to a violet dusk. Not a breath of wind stirred. It was long past the end of the workman's day.

A group of miserably clad men lounged on Welford Bridge, some gazing vacantly into the empty sky, and some gazing vacantly into the turbid water of the South London Canal, crawling beneath the bridge at the rate of a foot a minute towards its

outlet in the Mercantile Docks, on the Surrey shore between Greenwich and the Pool.

The men were all on the southern side of the bridge: they were loafers and long-shoremen. Most of them had pipes in their mouths. They were a disreputable-looking group, belonging to that section of the residuum which is the despair of philanthropists—the man who has nothing before him but work or crime, and can hardly be got to work.

One of them was leaning against the parapet with his face turned in mere idleness up the canal. He was not looking at anything: his full, prominent, meaningless blue eyes were fixed on nothing. Directly in the line of his vision, and between him and Camberwell, were Crawford's Bay and Boland's Ait. The ait, so called by some derisive humourist, lay in the mouth of the

bay, the outer side of it forming one bank of the canal, and the inner side corresponding with the sweep of Crawford's Bay, formed forty feet of canal water.

The man looking south was low-sized, red-bearded, red-whiskered, red-haired, with a battered brown felt hat, a neckerchief of no determinable colour, a torn check shirt, a dark blue ragged pea-jacket of pilot cloth, no waistcoat, a pair of brown stained trousers, and boots several sizes too large for him, turned up at the toes, and so bagged and battered and worn that they looked as though they could not be moved another step without falling asunder. This man would have told a mere acquaintance that his name was Jim Ford, but he was called by those who knew him Red Jim.

All at once he uttered a strong exclamation of surprise without shifting his position.

"What is it, Jim?" asked a tall, lank, dark man by his side.

The others of the group turned and looked in the direction in which Jim's eyes were fixed.

"Why," said Red Jim, in a tone of incredulity and indignation, "there's some one in Crawford's House!"

"Of course there is, you fool! Why, where have you been? Haven't you heard? Have you been with the Salvation Army, or only doing a stretch?"

"Fool yourself!" said Red Jim. "Mind what you're saying, or perhaps I'll stretch you a bit, long as you are already." The other men laughed at this personal sally. It reduced long Ned Bayliss to sullen silence, and restored Red Jim to his condition of objectless vacuity.

"I hear," said a man who had not yet spoken, "that Crawford's House is let."

"Let!" cried another, as though any one who mentioned the matter as news must be ages behind the times. "Let! I should think it is!"

"And yet it isn't so much let, after all," said Ned Bayliss, turning round in a captious manner. "You can't exactly say a place is let when a man goes to live in his own house."

"Why, Crawford's dead this long and merry," objected a voice.

"Well," said Ned Bayliss, "and if he is, and if he left all to his wife for as long as she kept his name, and if she married a second time and got her new husband to change his name instead of *her* changing *hers*—how is that, do you think, Matt Jordan?"

It was plain by Ned Bayliss's manner and by the way in which this speech was received by the listeners that he was looked

up to as a being of extraordinary mental endowment, and possessed preëminently of the power of lucid exposition.

"True enough," said Matt Jordan humbly, as he hitched up his trousers and shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, and coughed a self-deprecatory cough. "And a snug property he has come into, I say. I only wish I was in his place."

Jordan was a squat, ill-favoured man of forty.

"Why," said Bayliss derisively, "a man with your points wouldn't throw himself away on a sickly widow with only a matter of a thousand a-year or thereabouts out of a lot of ramshackle tenement-houses and canal wharfs. You'd look higher, Matt. Why, you'd want a titled lady, any way. With your face and figure, you ought to be able to do a great deal better than an elderly sickly widow, even if she is rich."

Jordan shifted his felt hat, made no reply, and for a while there was silence.

Crawford's House, of which the loungers on Welford Bridge were speaking, stood a few feet back from the inner edge of Crawford's Bay, about three hundred yards from the bridge. Jim Ford, the first speaker, had concluded, from seeing all the sashes of the house open, and a woman cleaning a window, and a strip of carpet hanging out of another, that a tenant had been found for this lonely and isolated dwelling, which had been standing idle for years.

"Have you seen this turncoat Crawford?" asked a man after a pause.

No one had seen him.

"He must have a spirit no better than a dog's to change his name for her money," said Red Jim, without abandoning his study of Crawford's House, on which his vacant

eyes now rested with as much curiosity as the expressionless blue orbs were capable of.

"It would be very handy for *some* people to change their names like that, or in any other way that wouldn't bring a trifle of canvas and a few copper bolts to the mind of any one in the neighbourhood of the East India Docks," said Bayliss, looking at that point of the sky directly above him, lest any one might fancy his words had a personal application.

With an oath, Red Jim turned round, and, keeping his side close to the parapet, slouched slowly away towards the King William public-house, which stood at the bottom of the short approach to the steep humpbacked bridge.

"Nice chap he is to talk of changing a name for money being disgraceful!" said Bayliss, when the other was out of hearing.

"He was as near as ninepence to doing time over them canvas and bolts at the East India. Look at him now, going to the William as if he had money! *He* isn't the man that could stand here if he had a penny in his rags." The speaker jingled some coins in his own pocket to show how he, being a man of intellectual resources and strong will, could resist temptation before which common clay, such as Red Jim was made of, must succumb.

Red Jim did not enter the William. As he reached the door he stopped and looked along the road. A man coming from the western end drew up in front of him and said:

"Is that Welford Bridge?" pointing to where the group of loungers stood, with the upper portions of their bodies illumined by the western glow against the darkening eastern sky.

"Yes," said Jim sullenly, "that's Welford Bridge."

"Do you know where Crawford's Bay is, here on the South London Canal? Is that the canal bridge?"

"I know where Crawford's Bay is right enough," said the other doggedly. He was not disposed to volunteer any information. "Do you want to go to Crawford's Bay? If you do, I can show you the way. I'm out of work, gov'nor, and stone broke."

"Very good. Come along and show me Crawford's House. I'll pay you for your trouble."

Red Jim led the way back to the bridge.

"Who has he picked up?" asked Bayliss jealously, as the two men passed the group.

None of the loungers answered.

"He's turning down Crawford Street," said Bayliss, when the two men had gone a hundred yards beyond the bridge.

"So he is," said another. Bayliss was the most ready of speech, and monopolised the conversation. His mates regarded him as one rarely gifted in the matter of language; as one who would, without doubt, have made an orator if ambition had led the way.

"I wonder what Red Jim is bringing that man down Crawford street for? No good, I'm sure."

"Seems a stranger," suggested the other man. "Maybe he wants Jim to show him the way."

"Ay," said Bayliss in a discontented tone. "There's a great deal to be seen down Crawford Street! Lovely views; plenty of rotting doors. Now, if they only got in on the wharf, Jim could show him the old empty ice-house there. Do you know, if any one was missing hereabouts, and a good reward was offered, I'd get the drags and

have a try in the ice-house. There's ten feet of water in it if there's an inch, so I'm told."

"It is a lonesome place. I wonder they don't pump the water out."

"Pump it out, you fool! How could they? Why, 'twould fill as fast as any dozen fire-engines could pump it out. The water from the canal soaks into it as if the wall was a sieve."

Nothing more was said for a while. Then suddenly, Bayliss, whose eyes were turned towards the bay, uttered an oath, and exclaimed, "We're a heap of fools, that's what we are, not to guess. Why, it must be Crawford, the new Crawford—not the Crawford that's dead and buried, but the one that's alive and had the gumption to marry the sickly widow for her money! There he is at the window with that girl I saw going into the house to-day."

Bayliss stretched out his long lean arm, and pointed with his thin grimy hand over the canal towards Crawford's House, at one of the windows of which a man and woman could be seen looking out into the dark turbid waters of Crawford's Bay.

CHAPTER II.

CRAWFORD'S HOUSE.

CRAWFORD STREET, into which the stranger and his uncouth conductor had turned, was a narrow, dingy, neglected blind lane. The end of it was formed of a brick wall, moss-grown and ragged. On the right-hand side were gates and doors of idle wharves, whose rears abutted on the bay; on the left, a long low unbroken wall separating the roadway from a desolate waste, where rubbish might be shot, according to a dilapidated and half-illegible notice-board; but on the plot were only two small mounds of that dreary material, crowned with a few battered rusty iron and tin utensils of undeterminable use.

In the street, which was a couple of hundred yards long, stood the only dwelling. Opposite the door Red Jim drew up, and, pointing, said, "That's Crawford's House. I belong to this neighbourhood. I'm called after the place. My name is James Ford. I'm called after the place, same as a lord is called after a place. They found me twenty-nine years ago on the tow-path. Nobody wanted me much then or since. Maybe you're the new Mr. Crawford, and, like me, called after the place too?" He spoke in a tone of curiosity.

At the question, his companion started, looking at Red Jim out of a pair of keen, quick, furtive eyes. "I told you I would pay you for showing me the place. Here's sixpence. If you want any information of me, you'll have to pay me for it. If you really care to know my name, I'll tell it

to you for that sixpence." The stranger laughed a short sharp laugh, handed Red Jim the coin, and kept his hand outstretched as if to take it back.

Jim turned on his heel, and slunk away muttering.

The stranger knocked with his fist on the door, from which the knocker was missing. The panels had originally been painted a grass-green, now faded down to the sober hue of the sea.

The door was opened by a tall slender girl, whose golden-brown hair was flying in wild confusion over her white forehead and red cheeks, and across her blue eyes, in which, as in the hair, flashed a glint of gold. She smiled and laughed apologetically, and thrust her floating hair back from her face with both her hands.

"Miss Layard?" said the stranger, raising his hat and bowing. He thought,

"What beauty, what health, what spirits, what grace, what youth, what deliciousness!"

"Yes," she answered, stepping back for him to enter. "Mr. Crawford?" she asked in her turn.

"My name is Crawford," he said going in. "I—I was not quite prepared to find you what you are, Miss Layard—I mean so—so young. When your brother spoke to me of his sister, I fancied he meant some one much older than himself."

She smiled, and laughed again as she led him into the front room, now in a state of chaotic confusion.

"We did not expect you till later. My brother has not come home yet. We have only moved in to-day, and we are, O! in such dreadful confusion."

On the centre of the floor was spread a square of very old threadbare carpet,

leaving a frame of worn old boards around it. In the centre of the carpet stood a small dining-table. Nothing else in the room was in its place. The half-dozen poor chairs, the chiffonnier, the one easy-chair, the couch, were all higgledy-piggledy. The furniture was of the cheapest kind, made to catch the inexperienced eye. Although evidently not old, it was showing signs of decrepitude. It had once, no doubt, looked bright and pleasant enough, but now the spring seats of the chairs were bulged, and the green plush expanse of the couch rose and fell like miniature grazing-land of rolling hillocks.

The young girl placed a seat for her visitor, and took one herself with another of those bright cheerful laughs which were delicious music, and seemed to make light and perfume in the darkening cheerless room.

"My brother told me you were not likely to be here until ten; but your rooms are all ready, if you wish to see them."

She leant back in her chair and clasped her hands in her lap, a picture of beautiful, joyous girlhood.

He regarded her with undisguised admiration. She returned his looks with smiling, unruffled tranquillity.

"So," he said in a low voice, as though he did not wish the noise of his own words to distract his sense of seeing, concentrated on her face and lithe graceful figure, "you got my rooms ready, while you left your own in chaos?"

"You are too soon," she answered, nodding her head playfully. "If you had not come until ten, we should have had this room in order. As you see, it was well we arranged the other rooms first. Would you like to see them?"

"Not just now. I am quite content here for the present," he said, with a gallant gesture towards her.

"I don't think my brother will be very long. In fact, when you knocked I felt quite sure it was Alfred. O! here he is. Pardon me," she cried, springing up, and hurrying to the door.

In a few minutes Alfred Layard was shaking hands with the other man, saying pleasantly and easily, "I do not know, Mr. Crawford, whether it is I ought to welcome you, or you ought to welcome me. You are at once my landlord and my tenant."

"And you, on your side, necessarily are my landlord and my tenant also. Let us welcome one another, and hope we may be good friends."

With a wave of his hand he included the girl in this proposal.

"Agreed!" cried Layard cheerfully, as he again shook the short plump hand of the elder man.

"You see," said Crawford, explaining the matter with a humorous toss of the head and a chuckle, "your brother is my tenant, since he has taken this house, and I am his tenant, since I have taken two rooms in this house. I have just been saying to Miss Layard," turning from the sister to the brother, "that when you spoke to me of your sister who looked after your little boy, I imagined she must be much older than you."

"Instead of which you find her a whole ten years younger," said Layard, putting his arm round the girl's slim waist lightly and affectionately; "and yet, although she is only a child, she is as wise with her little motherless nephew as if she were Methuselah's sister."

The girl blushed and escaped from her brother's arm.

"You would think," she said, "that there was some credit in taking care of Freddie. Why, he's big enough and good enough to take care of himself, and me into the bargain. I asked Mr. Crawford, Alfred, if he would like to look at his rooms, but he seemed to wish to see you."

"And I am here at last," said Layard. "Well, shall we go and look at them now? You observe the confusion we are in here. We cannot, I fear, offer you even a cup of tea to drink to our better acquaintance."

Crawford rose, and the three left the room and began ascending the narrow massive and firm old stairs.

To look at brother and sister, no one would fancy they were related. He was tall and lank, with dark swarthy face, deep-sunken small grey eyes, not remark-

able for their light, dark brown hair, and snub nose. The most remarkable feature of his face was his beard—dark dull brown which looked almost dun, and hung down from each side of his chin in two enormous thin streamers. His face in repose was the embodiment of invincible melancholy; but by some unascertainable means it was able to light up under the influence of humour, or affection, or joy, in a way all the more enchanting because so wholly unexpected.

Alfred Layard was thirty years of age, and had been a widower two years, his young wife dying a twelve-month after the birth of her only child Freddie, now three.

William Crawford was a man of very different mould: thick-set, good-looking, with bold brown eyes, clean-shaven face, close thick hair which curled all over a massive head, full lips that had few movements, and handsome well-cut forehead too

hollow for beauty in the upper central region. The face was singularly immobile, but it had a look of energy and resolution about it that caught the eye and held the attention, and ended in arousing something between curiosity and fear in the beholder. Plainly, a man with a will of his own, and plenty of energy to carry that will out. In all his movements, even those of courtesy, there was a suggestion of irrepressible vigour. His age was about five or six and thirty.

It was an odd procession. In front, the gay fair girl with azure eyes, golden-brown hair, and lithe form, ascending with elastic step. Behind her, the thick-set, firm, resolute figure of the elder man, with dark, impassive, immobile features, bold dark eyes, and firm lips, moving as though prepared to meet opposition and ready to overcome it. Last, the tall, lank, angular

form of the young widower, with plain, almost ugly, face, deep-set eyes, snub nose, dull complexion, and long melancholy dun beard, flowing like a widow's streamers in two thin scarves behind him. Here were three faces, one of which was always alight, a second which could never light, and a third usually dull and dead, but which could light at will.

"This is the sitting-room," said Hetty, standing at the threshold. "You said you would prefer having the back room furnished as the sitting room, Alfred told me."

"Yes, certainly, the back for the sitting-room," said Crawford, as they entered. He looked round sharply with somewhat the same surprising quickness of glance which had greeted Red Jim's question at the door. It conveyed the idea of a man at once curious and on his guard.

His survey seemed to satisfy him, for he ceased to occupy himself with the room, and said, turning to the brother and sister, with a short laugh, "This, as you know, is my first visit to Crawford Street. I had no notion what kind of a place it was; and when I am here, two or three days in the month, and a week additional each quarter, I should like to be quiet and much to myself. I don't, of course, my dear Mr. Layard, mean with regard to your sister and you," he bowed, "but the people all round. They are not a very nice class of people, are they?" with a shrug of his shoulders at people who were not very nice.

"There are no people at all near us," answered Layard cheerfully. "No one else lives in the street, and we have the canal, or rather the Bay, at the back."

"Capital! capital!" cried Crawford in

a spiritless voice, though he rubbed his hands as if enjoying himself immensely. "You, saving for the presence of Miss Layard and your little boy, whose acquaintance, by the way, I have not yet made, are a kind of Robinson Crusoe here."

"O!" cried Hetty, running to the window and pointing out, "the real Robinson Crusoe is here."

"Where? I hope he has Man Friday, parrot, and all;" walking to the window, where they stood looking out, the girl, with her round arm, pointing into the gathering dusk. In the window-place, they were almost face to face. Instead of instantly following the direction of Hetty's arm, he followed the direction of his thoughts, and while her eyes were gazing out of the window, his were fixed upon her face.

"There," she said, upon finding his eyes were not in the direction of her hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I can see no one."

He was now looking out of the window.

"But you can see his island."

"Again I beg your pardon, but I can see no island."

"What you see there *is* an island. That is not the tow-path right opposite: that is Boland's Ait."

"Boland's Ait! Yes, I have heard of Boland's Ait. I have nothing to do with it, I believe?" he turned to Layard.

"I think not."

"O, no!" said the girl laughing; "the whole island is the property of Mr. Francis Bramwell, a most mysterious man, who is either an astrologer, or an author, or a pirate, or something wonderful and romantic."

"Why," cried her brother in amused surprise, "where on earth did you get this information?"

"From Mrs. Grainger, whom you sent to help me to-day. Mrs. Grainger knows the history of the whole neighbourhood from the time of Adam."

"The place cannot have existed so long," said Crawford, with another of his short laughs; "for it shows no sign of having been washed even as far back as the Flood. Is your Crusoe old or young?"

"Young, I am told, and handsome. I assure you the story is quite romantic."

"And is there much more of the story of this Man Friday, or whatever he is?" asked Crawford carelessly, as he moved away from the window towards the door.

"Well," said she, "that is a good deal to begin with; and then it is said he has been ruined by some one or other, or some-

thing or other, either betting on horses or buying shares in railways to the moon, and that he did these foolish things because his wife ran away from him ; and now he lives all alone on his island, and leaves it very seldom, and never has any visitors, or hardly any, and is supposed to be writing a book proving that woman is a mistake and ought to be abolished."

"The brute!" interpolated Crawford, bowing to Hetty, as though in protest against any one who could say an unkind thing of the sex to which she belonged.

"Isn't it dreadful?" cried the girl in a tone of comic distress. She was still standing by the window, one cheek and side of her golden-brown hair illumined by the fading light, and her blue eyes dancing with mischievous excitement. "And they say that, much as he hates women, he hates men more."

"Ah! that is a redeeming feature," said Crawford. "A misanthropist is intelligible, but a misogynist is a thing beyond reason, and hateful."

"But, Hetty," said Layard, "if the man lives so very much to himself and does not leave his house, how is all this known?"

"Why, because all the women have not been abolished yet. Do you fancy there ever was a mystery a woman could not find out? It is the business of women to fathom mysteries. I'll engage that before we are a week here I shall know twice as much as I do now of our romantic neighbour."

"And then," said Crawford, showing signs of flagging interest, and directing his attention once more to the arrangement of the room, "perhaps Miss Layard will follow this Crusoe's example, and write a book against men."

"No, no. I like men."

He turned round and looked fully at her. "And upon my word, Miss Layard," said he warmly, "I think you would find a vast majority of men very willing to reciprocate the feeling."

Hetty laughed, and so did her brother.

"As I explained," said Crawford, "I shall want these rooms only once a month. I shall have to look after the property in this neighbourhood. I think I shall take a leaf out of our friend Crusoe's book, and keep very quiet and retired. I care to be known in this neighbourhood as little as possible. There is property of another kind in town. It, too, requires my personal supervision. I shall make this place my head-quarters, and keep what changes of clothes I require here. It is extremely unlikely I shall have any visitors. By the way, in what direction does Camberwell lie?" He asked the question with an elaborate

carelessness which did not escape Alfred Layard.

"Up there," said Layard, waving his left hand in a southerly direction.

Once more Crawford approached the window. This time he leaned out, resting his hand on the sill.

In front of him lay Boland's Ait, a little island about a hundred yards long and forty yards wide in the middle, tapering off to a point at either end. Beyond the head of the island, pointing south, the tow-path was visible, and beyond the tail of the island the tow-path again, and further off Welford Bridge, lying north.

Hetty was leaning against the wainscot of the old-fashioned deep embrasure.

"Does that tow-path lead to Camberwell?" asked Crawford.

"Yes," answered the girl, making a gesture to the left.

"Is it much frequented?" asked he in a voice he tried to make commonplace, but from which he could not banish the hint of anxiety.

"O, no, very few people go along it."

"But now, I suppose, people sometimes come from that direction," waving his left hand, "for a walk?"

"Well," said the girl demurely, "the scenery isn't very attractive; but there is nothing to prevent people coming, if they pay the toll."

"O, there *is* a toll?" he said in a tone of relief, as if the knowledge of such a barrier between him and Camberwell were a source of satisfaction to him.

"Yes; a halfpenny on weekdays and a penny on Sundays."

He leaned further out. The frame of the window shook slightly. "We must have this woodwork fixed," he said a little

peevishly. "What building is this here on your left?—a store of some kind with the gates off."

"That's the empty ice-house. It belongs to you, I believe."

"Ah! the empty ice-house. So it is. I never saw an ice-house before."

"It is full of water," said the girl, again drawing on the charwoman's store of local information. "It makes me quite uncomfortable to think of it."

The man, bending out of the window, shuddered, and shook the window-frame sharply. "There seems to be a great deal of water about here, and it doesn't look very ornamental."

"No," said Hetty; "but it's very useful."

Crawford's eyes were still directed to the left, but not at so sharp an angle as to command a view of the vacant ice-house.

He was gazing across the head of the island at the tow-path.

Suddenly he drew in with a muttered imprecation; the window-frame shook violently, and a large piece of mortar fell and struck him on the nape of the neck. He sprang back with a second half-uttered malediction, and stood bolt upright a pace from the window, but did not cease to gaze across the head of the island.

Along the tow-path a tall man was advancing rapidly, swinging his arms in a remarkable manner as he walked.

"No, no, not hurt to speak of," he answered, with a hollow laugh, in reply to a question of Layard's, still keeping his eyes fixed on the tow-path visible beyond Boland's Ait. "The mortar has got down my back. I shall change my coat and get rid of the mortar. My portmanteau has come, I perceive. Thank you, I am not

hurt. Good evening for the present," he added, as brother and sister moved towards the door.

Although he did not stir further from the window, they saw he was in haste they should be gone, so they hurried away, shutting the door behind them.

When they had disappeared he went back to the window, and muttered in a hoarse voice: "I could have sworn it was Philip Ray—Philip Ray, her brother, who registered an oath he would shoot me whenever or wherever he met me, and he is the man to keep his word. He lives at Camberwell. It must have been he. If it was he, in a few minutes he will come out on the towpath at the other end of the island; in two minutes—in three minutes at the very outside—he must come round the tail of the island, and then I can make sure whether it is Philip Ray or not. He will be only

half the distance from me that he was before, and there will be light enough to make sure."

He waited two, three, four, five minutes —quarter of an hour, but from behind neither end of the island did the man emerge on the tow-path. There could be no doubt of this, for from where he stood a long stretch of the path was visible north and south beyond the island, and William Crawford's eyes swung from one end of the line to the other as frequently as the pendulum of a clock.

At length, when half-an-hour had passed, and it was almost dark, he became restless, excited, and in the end went down-stairs. In the front room he found Layard on the top of a step-ladder. He said:

"I was looking out of my window, and a man, coming from the northern end of the tow-path, disappeared behind the island,

behind Boland's Ait. He has not come back and he has not come out at the other end. Where can he have gone? Is there some way of getting off the tow-path between the two points?" The speaker's manner was forced into a form of pleasant wonder; but there were strange white lines, like lines of fear, about his mouth and the corners of his eyes. "Is there a gate or way off the tow-path?"

"No. The man *must* have come off the tow-path or gone into the water and been drowned," said Layard, not noticing anything peculiar in the other, and answering half-playfully.

"That would be too good," cried Crawford with a start, apparently taken off his guard.

"Eh?" cried Layard, facing round suddenly. He was in the act of driving in a brass-headed nail. The fervour in Craw-

ford's tone caught his ear and made him suspend the blow he was about to deliver.

"O, nothing," said the other, with one of his short laughs. "A bad-natured joke. I meant it would be too much of a joke to think a man could be drowned in such a simple way. But this man hid himself behind the island and did not come forth at either end for half-an-hour, and I thought I'd ask you what you thought, as the circumstance piqued me. Good-night."

When he found himself in his own room he closed the window, pulled down the blind, hasped the shutters, and drew the curtains. He looked round on the simple unpretending furniture suspiciously, and muttered:

"He here—if it were he, and I think it was, appearing and disappearing in such a way! He cannot have found me out? Curse him, curse her; ay, curse her! Is

not that all over now? She was to blame, too."

He walked up and down the room for an hour.

"If that was Philip Ray, where did he go to? He seems to have vanished. Layard knows every foot of this place. It *was* Philip Ray, and he did vanish! Could he have seen me and recognised me? or could he have tracked me, and is he now out on that little quay or wharf under my window, *waiting* for me? Ugh!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PINE GROVES OF LEEHAM.

Below London Bridge, and just at the end of the Pool, the Thames makes a sharp bend north, and keeps this course for close on a mile. Then it sweeps in a gentle curve eastward for half a mile; after this it suddenly turns south, and keeps on in a straight line for upwards of a mile. The part of London bounded on three sides by these sections of the river is not very densely populated if the acreage is considered. Much of it is taken up with the vast system of the Mercantile Docks; large spaces are wholly unbuilt on; the South London Canal, its tow-path, and double row of wharves and

yards, cover a large area; and one of the most extensive gasworks in the metropolis and a convergence of railway lines take up space to the exclusion of people. There are stretches of this district as lonely by night as the top of Snowdon.

Little life stirs by day on the canal; after dark the waters and the tow-path are as deserted as a village graveyard. Along the railroad by day no human foot travels but the milesman's, and at night the traffic falls off to a mere echo of its incessant mighty roar by day. The gasworks are busy, and glowing and flaming and throbbing all through the hours of gloom and darkness, but people cannot get near them. They are enclosed by high walls on all sides except one, and on that side lies the South London Canal, which crawls and crawls unhastened and unrefreshed by the waters of any lock.

The solitude of the tow-path after dark is enhanced at the point where it passes opposite the gasworks by the appearance of life across the water, and the impossibility of reaching that life, touching the human hands that labour there, receiving aid from kindly men if aid were needed. The tow-path at this point is narrow and full of fathomless shadows, in which outcasts, thieves, and murderers might lurk; deep doorways, pilasters, and ruined warehouses, where misery or crime could hide or crouch.

But of all the loneliness by night in this region which is vaguely styled the Mercantile Docks, the deepest, the most affecting, the most chilling is that which dwells in the tortuous uninhabited approaches leading from the docks to the river north and south, and east and west from Deptford to Rotherhithe.

Out of the same spirit of mocking humour which gave the name of Boland's Ait to the little island in the canal, these solitary ways are called the Pine Groves. The pine-wood which gives them their name has ceased to be a landscape ornament many years, and now stands upright about ten feet high on either side of the roads, in the form of tarred planks.

There are miles of this monotonous black fencing, with no house or gate to break the depressing sameness. By day the Pine Groves are busy with the rumble of heavy traffic from the docks and wharves; by night they are as deserted as the crypt of St. Paul's.

Between the great gasworks and the docks, and at a point upon which the canal, the main railway, and three of these Pine Groves converge, there is an oasis of houses, a colony of men, a village, as it were, in

this desert made by man in the interest of trade and commerce. This patch of inhabited ground supports at most two hundred houses. The houses are humble, but not squalid. The inhabitants are not longshore-men, nor are they mostly connected with the sea or things maritime. They seem to be apart and distinct from the people found within a rifle-shot of the place. Although they are no farther than a thousand yards from Welford Bridge, to judge by their manners and speech, they are so much better mannered, civilised, and refined, that a thousand years and a thousand miles might lie between them and the long-shoremen and loafers from whom William Crawford had been supplied with a guide in Red Jim. This oasis in the desert of unbuilt space, this refuge from the odious solitude by night of the Pine Groves, this haunt of Arcadian respectability

in the midst of squalid and vicious surroundings, is honoured in the neighbourhood by the name of Leeham, and is almost wholly unknown in any other part of London. It will not do to say it has been forgotten, for it has never been borne in memory. The taxman and the gasman and the waterman, and the people who own houses there, know Leeham; but no other general outsiders. It is almost as much isolated from the rest of London as the Channel Islands.

It has not grown or diminished since the railway was built. No one ever thinks of pulling down an old house or building up a new one. Time-worn brass knockers are still to be found on the doors, and old-fashioned brass fenders and fireirons on the hearths within. Families never seem to move out of the district, and it never recruits its population from

the outer world. Now and then, indeed, a young man of Leeham may bring home a bride from one of the neighbouring tribes; but this is not often. A whole family is imported never. It is the most unprogressive spot in all her Majesty's dominions.

At first it seems impossible to account for so respectable a settlement in so squalid and savage a district. Who are the people of Leeham? And how do they live? When first put, the question staggers one. Most of the houses are not used for trade. Indeed, except at the point where the three Pine Groves meet, there is hardly a shop in the place. Where the East and West and River Pine Groves meet, there stands a cluster of shops, not more than a dozen, and the one public-house of Leeham, the Neptune. But the name of this house is the only thing in the business

district telling of the sea. Here is no maker of nautical instruments, no marine-store dealer, no curiosity shop for the purchase of the spoil of other climes brought home by Jack Tar, no music-hall or singing saloon, no slop-shop, no cheap photographer.

Here are a couple of eating-houses, noticeable for low prices and wholesome food ; a butcher's, and two beef-and-ham shops, two grocers', and a greengrocer's, two bakers', and an oil-and-colour man's. These, with the Neptune, or nucleus, form by night the brightly lighted business region of the settlement. This point is called the Cross.

Leeham repudiated the sea, and would have nothing to do with it at any price. Down by the docks the sea may be profitable, but it has not a good reputation. It is inclined to be rowdy, disreputable. Jack Tar ashore may not be worse than other

men, but he is more noisy and less observant of convention. He is too much given to frolic. He is not what any solid man would call respectable.

No one ever thought of impugning the respectability, as a class, of gasmen or railway officials. In fact, both are bound to be respectable. Leeham had, no doubt, some mysterious internal resources, but its chief external dependence was on the enormous gasworks and the railway hard by. Hundreds of men were employed in the gas-house and on the railway, and Leeham found a roof and food for three-fourths of the number. There were quiet houses for those whose means enabled them to keep up a separate establishment, and cheap lodgings for those who could afford only a single room. No man living in a dwelling-house of Leeham was of good repute unless he had private means, or was employed at either

the railway-yard or the gasworks—called, for the sake of brevity, the yard and the works. But it was a place in which many widows and spinsters had their homes, and sought to eke out an income from the savings of their dead husbands, fathers, or brothers, by some of the obscure forms of industry open to women of small needs and very small means.

The greengrocer's shop at Leeham Cross, opposite the Neptune, was owned by Mrs. Pemberton, an enormously fat, very florid widow of fifty. She almost invariably wore a smile on her expansive countenance, and was well known in the neighbourhood for her good nature and good temper. In fact, she was generally spoken of as "Mrs. Pemberton, that good-natured soul." The children all idolised her; for when they came of errands to buy, or for exercise and safety and a sight of the world with their mothers,

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Mrs. Pemberton never let them go away empty-handed as long as there was a small apple, or a bunch of currants, or a couple of nuts in the shop.

On that evening late in May when Red Jim showed Crawford the way to Crawford's House, Mrs. Pemberton stood at her shop door. She held her arms a-kimbo, and looked up and down the Cross with the expression of one who does not notice what she sees, and who is not expecting anything from the direction in which she is looking. The stout florid woman standing at the door of the greengrocer's was as unlike the ordinary Mrs. Pemberton as it was in the power of a troubled mind to make her. At this hour very few people passed Leeham Cross, and for a good five minutes no one had gone by her door.

Mrs. Pemberton had not remained constantly at the door. Once or twice she

stepped back for a moment, and threw her head on one side, and held her ear up as if listening intently; then, with a sigh, she came back to her post at the threshold. There must have been something very unusual in the conditions of her life to agitate this placid sympathetic widow so much.

Presently a woman of fine presence came in view, hastening towards the greengrocery. This was Mrs. Pearse, a widow like Mrs. Pemberton, and that good lady's very good friend.

"I needn't ask you; I can see by your face," said Mrs. Pearse, as she came up. "She is no better."

"She is much worse," said Mrs. Pemberton in a half-frightened, half-tearful way; "she is dying."

"Dying!" said the other woman. "I didn't think it would come to that."

"Well, it hurts me sore to say it, but I don't think she'll live to see the morning."

"So bad as that? Well, Mrs. Pemberton, I am sorry. Along with everything else, I am sorry for the trouble it will give you."

"O! don't say anything about that; I am only thinking of the poor lady herself. She's going fast, as far as I am a judge. And then, what's to become of the child? Poor innocent little fellow! he has no notion of what is happening. How could he? he's little more than a baby of three or four."

"Poor little fellow! I do pity him. Has she said anything to you?"

"Not a word."

"Not even told you her name?"

"No."

"Does she know, Mrs. Pemberton, how bad she is? Surely, if she knew the truth of her state of health, she'd say a word to you, if it was only for the child's sake. She

would not die, if she knew she was dying, and say nothing that could be of use to her little boy."

"You see, when the doctor was here this morning, he told her she was dangerously ill, but he did not tell her there was no hope. So I did my best to put a good face on the matter, and tried to persuade the poor thing that she'd be on the mending hand before nightfall. But she has got worse and worse all day, and I am sure when the doctor comes (I'm expecting him every minute) he'll tell her she's not long for this world. It's my opinion she won't last the night."

"Dear, dear, dear!—but I'm sorry."

"Here he is. Here's the doctor!"

"I'll run home now, Mrs. Pemberton, and give the children their supper. I'll come back in an hour to hear what the doctor says, and to do anything for you I can."

"Thank you! Thank you, Mrs. Pearse! I shall be very glad to see you, for I am grieved and half-terrified."

"I'll be sure to come. Try to bear up, Mrs. Pemberton," said kind-hearted Mrs. Pearse, hurrying off just as the doctor came up to the door.

True to her promise, Mrs. Pearse was back at the Cross. By this time the shutters of Mrs. Pemberton's shop were up; but the door stood ajar. Mrs. Pearse pushed it open and entered.

Mrs. Pemberton was sitting on a chair, surrounded by hampers and baskets of fruit and vegetables, in the middle of the shop. She was weeping silently, unconsciously, the large tears rolling down her round florid face. Her hands were crossed in her lap. Her eyes were wide open, and her whole appearance that of one in helpless despair.

When she saw her visitor come in, she

rose with a start, brushed the tears out of her eyes, and cried, seizing the hand of the other woman and pressing her down on a chair:

"I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Pearse! It is so good of you to come! I am in sore distress and trouble!"

"There, dear!" said the visitor in soothing tones. "Don't take on like that. All may yet be well. What does the doctor say about the poor soul?"

"All will never be well again for her. The doctor says she is not likely to see another day, short as these nights are. O my—O my heart! but it grieves me to think of her going, and she so young. And to think of what a pretty girl she must have been; to think of how handsome she must have been before the trouble, whatever it is, came upon her and wore her to a shadow."

"And I suppose she has not opened her mind to you even yet about this trouble?"

The question was not asked out of idle curiosity, but from deep-seated interest in the subject of the conversation. For this was not the first or the tenth talk these two kindly friends had about the sick woman upstairs.

"She has said no more to me than the dead. My reading of it is, that she made a bad match against the will of her people, and that her husband deserted her and her child."

"And what about the boy? Does the poor sufferer know how bad she is?"

"Yes; she knows that there's not any hope, and the doctor told me to be prepared for the worst, and that she might die in a couple of hours. Poor soul! I shall be sorry!"

Mrs. Pemberton threw her apron over her head, and wept and sobbed; Mrs. Pearse weeping the while for company.

When Mrs. Pemberton was able to control herself, she drew down her apron and said:

"I never took to any other lodger I had so much as I took to this poor woman. Her loneliness and her sorrow made me feel to her as if she had been my own child. Then I know she must be very poor, although she always paid me to the minute. But bit by bit I have missed whatever little jewellery she had, and now I think all is gone. But she is not without money; for, when I was talking to her just now, she told me that she had enough in her work box to pay all expenses. O, Mrs. Pearse, it is hard to hear the poor young thing talking in that way of going, and I, who must be twice her age, well and hearty!"

Again the good woman broke down and had to pause in her story.

"She told me no one should be at any expense on her account; and as for the boy, she said she knew a gentleman, one who had been a friend of hers years ago, and that he would surely take charge of the child, and that she had sent word to a trusty messenger to come and fetch the boy to this friend, and that she would not see or hear from any one who knew her in her better days. I can't make it out at all. There is something hidden, some mystery in the matter."

"Mystery, Mrs. Pemberton? Of course there is. But, as you say, most likely she made a bad match, and is afraid to meet her people, and has been left to loneliness and sorrow and poverty by a villain of a husband. She hasn't made away with her wedding-ring, has she?"

"No; nor with the keeper. But I think all else is gone in the way of jewellery. I left Susan, the servant, with her just now. She said she wished to be quiet for a while, as she wanted to write a letter. Now that the shop is shut I can't bear to be away from her, and when I am in the room I can't bear to see her with her poor swollen red face, and I don't think she is always quite right in her mind, for the disease has spread, and the doctor says she can hardly last the night. Poor, poor young creature!"

Here for the third time, kind sympathetic Mrs. Pemberton broke down, and for some minutes neither of the women spoke.

At length Mrs. Pemberton started and rose from her chair, saying hastily:

"She must have finished the letter. I hear Susan coming down the stairs."

The girl entered the shop quickly and with an alarmed face.

"The lady wants to see you at once, ma'am. She seems in a terrible hurry, and looks much worse."

Mrs. Pemberton hastened out of the shop, asking Mrs. Pearse to wait.

In a few minutes she returned, carrying a letter in her hand, and wearing a look of intense trouble and perplexity on her honest face.

"I am sure," she said, throwing herself on a chair, "I do not know whether I am asleep or awake, or whether I am to believe my eyes and my ears. Do you know where she told me she is sending the child now—to-night—for she cannot die easy until 'tis done."

"I cannot tell. Where?"

"I heard her say the words quite plainly, but I could not believe my ears. The words are quite plain on this letter, though they are written in pencil, but I cannot believe

my eyes. Read what is on this envelope, and I shall know whether I have lost my reason or not. That's where she says the child is to go. This is the old friend she says will look after the little boy!"

She handed the letter she held in her hand to her friend. Mrs. Pearse read:

"Francis Bramwell, Esq.,
Boland's Ait,
South London Canal."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING MAN.

It was near ten o'clock that night before Alfred Layard and his sister gave up trying to get their new home into order. Even then much remained to be done, but Mrs. Grainger, the charwoman who had been assisting Hetty all day, had to go home to prepare supper for her husband, and when she was gone the brother and sister sat down to their own.

Alfred Layard was employed in the gas-works. His duties did not oblige him to be at business early; but they kept him there until late in the evening. He had a very small salary, just no more than enough to live on in strict economy. He had rented

a little cottage during his brief married life, and the modest furniture in the room where the brother and sister now sat at supper had been bought for his bride's home out of his savings. Just as his lease of the cottage expired he heard of this house, and that the owner or agent would be glad to let it at a rent almost nominal on the condition of two rooms being reserved and kept in order for him.

The place just suited Layard. It was within a short distance of the gas-house, and he calculated that the arrangement would save him twenty pounds a-year.

"Well, Hetty," said he, with one of his surprisingly pleasant smiles, as the supper went on, "how do you like the life of a lodging-house keeper?"

"So far I like it very much indeed, although I have had no chance of pillage yet."

"Never mind the pillage for a while. I

must see if there is any handbook published on the subject of the 'Lodger Pigeon.' I am not quite sure there is a book of the kind. I have a notion the art is traditional, handed down by word of mouth, and that you have to be sworn of the guild or something of that kind. Before we had our knockdown in the world, in father's time, when I lived in lodgings in Bloomsbury, I knew a little of the craft—as a victim, mind you; but now I have forgotten all about it, except that neither corks nor stoppers had appreciable effect in retarding the evaporation of wine or spirits, and that fowl or game or meat always went too bad twelve hours after it was cooked to be of further use to me. Tea also would not keep in the insalubrious air of Bloomsbury."

"Well," said the girl with a smile, "I suppose I must only live in hope. I cannot expect to be inspired. It would, perhaps,

be unreasonable to expect that the sight of our first lodger for half-an-hour would make me perfect in the art of turning him to good account. It is a distressing thing to feel one is losing one's opportunity; but then, what is one to do?" she asked pathetically, spreading out her hands to her brother in comic appeal.

"It is hard," said he with anxiety; then brightening he added, "Let us pray for better times, better luck, more light. By the way, Hetty, now that we have fully arranged our method of fleecing the stranger, what do you think of him? How do you find him? Do you like him?"

"I find him very good-looking and agreeable."

"I hope there is no danger of your falling in love with him. Remember, he is a married man," said the brother, shaking a minatory finger at the girl opposite him;

"and bear in mind bigamy is a seven years' affair."

"It's very good of you to remind me, Alfred," she said gravely. "But as I have not been married, I don't see how I could commit bigamy."

"You are not qualified *yet* to commit it yourself, but you might become an accessory."

"By the way, Alfred, now that I think of it," said she, dropping her playful manner and looking abstracted and thoughtful, with a white finger on her pink cheek, "I did notice a remarkable circumstance about our new lodger. Did you?"

"No," said the brother, throwing himself back in his chair and looking at the ceiling, "except that he has a habit of winking both his eyes when he is in thought, which always indicates a man fond of double-dealing. Don't you see, Hetty?—one eye winked,

single-dealing; two eyes, double-dealing. What can be more natural? There is one thing about trade I can never make out. Book-keeping by double-entry is an interesting, respectable, and laudable affair, and yet double-dealing is little short of infamous."

"I don't understand what you are saying, Alfred," said the girl in a voice of reproach and despair. "I don't think you know yourself, and I am sure it's nonsense."

"Yes, dear."

"No; I'm not joking," she cried impatiently. "I *did* observe something very remarkable about Mr. Crawford under the circumstances. Did you not notice he never spoke of his wife, or even referred to her, although he got all this property through her or from her?"

Layard looked down from the dingy ceiling. "Of course, you are right, child. I did not notice it at the time; but now I

recollect he neither spoke of his wife nor made any reference to her. It was strange. And now that I think of it, he did not upon our previous meeting. It is strange. I suppose he is ashamed to own he owes everything to his wife."

"Well," said the girl hotly, "if he had the courage to take her money he might have the courage to own it, particularly as he is aware we know all about him."

"All about him?" said the brother in surprise. "Indeed, we don't know all about him; we know very little about him—that is, unless this wonderful wife of Grainger told you."

"No; she told me nothing about him. But we know that the money belonged to Mrs. Crawford and not to him, and that he changed his name to marry the widow, as otherwise her property would go somewhere else."

"To Guy's Hospital. But it would not go to the hospital if she remained unmarried. The fact of the matter is, I believe, that this Crawford—I mean the original one—was a self-made man, and very proud of his own achievements, and wished to keep his name associated with his money as long as possible. You see, when he married he was an elderly, if not an old man, and his wife was a young and very handsome woman. Now she is middle-aged and an invalid."

"Then," cried Hetty with sprightly wrath, "I think it the more shameful for him to make no allusion to her. But you have not told me all the story. Tell it to me now, there's a good, kind dear Alfred. But first I'll clear away, and run up for a moment to see how Freddie is in his new quarters. He was so tired after the day that he fell asleep before his head touched the pillow."

She found the boy sleeping deeply in his

cot beside her own bed. She tucked him in, although the clothes had not been disarranged, and then bent down over him, laying her forearm all along his little body, and, drawing him to her side, kissed him first on the curls and then on the cheek and then smoothed with her hand the curl she had kissed, as though her tender lips had disturbed it. After this she ran down quickly, and, entering the sitting-room, said, as she took her chair, "He hasn't stirred since I put him to bed, poor chap. I hope he won't find this place very lonely. He will not even see another child here. And now, Alfred," she added, taking up some work, "tell me all you know about our lodger, for I have heard little or nothing yet."

"Well, what I know is soon told. His old name was Goddard, William Goddard. He came to live at Richmond some time ago, and lodged next door to Mrs. Crawford's

house. She was then an invalid, suffering from some affection which almost deprived her of the use of her limbs. She went out only in a carriage or Bath-chair. He met her frequently, and became acquainted with her, often walking beside her in her Bath-chair. Her bedroom was on the first floor of her house; his was on the first floor of the next house. One night the lower part of her house caught fire. He crept on a stone ledge running along both houses at the level of the first floor window. He had a rope, and by it lowered her down into the garden and saved her life, every one said. The shock, strange to say, had a beneficial effect upon her health. She recovered enough strength to be able to walk about, and—she married him."

The girl paused in her work, dropping her hands and her sewing, and falling into a little reverie, with her head on one side.

"So that he is a kind of hero," she said softly.

"Yes; a kind of hero. I don't think his risk was very great, for he could have jumped at any time, and got off with a broken leg or so."

"A broken leg or so!" cried she indignantly. "Upon my word, Alfred, you do take other people's risks coolly. I don't wonder at her marrying him, and I am very sorry I said anything against him awhile ago. The age of chivalry is not gone. Now, if she was young and good-looking — but forty and an invalid——"

"And very rich," interrupted the brother, stretching himself out on the infirm couch and blowing a great cloud of smoke from his briar-root pipe.

"Your cynicism is intolerable, Alfred. It is most unmanly and ungenerous, and I

for one have made up my mind to like, to admire Mr.——"

A knock at the door prevented her finishing the sentence.

"Come in," cried Layard, springing up and moving towards the door.

"I am afraid it is a most unreasonable hour to disturb you."

"Not at all," said Layard, setting a chair for the lodger. "My sister and I were merely chatting. We are not early people, you must know. I haven't to be at the works until late, so we generally have our little talks nearer to midnight than most people. Pray sit down."

Crawford sat down somewhat awkwardly, winking both his eyes rapidly as he did so. He gave one of his short sharp laughs.

"You will think me very foolish, no doubt," he said, looking from one to the other and winking rapidly, "but, do you

know, what you said about that man going into the canal has had a most unaccountable and unpleasant effect upon me. I feel quite unnerved. As you are aware, I am not acquainted with the neighbourhood. Would it be asking too much of you, Mr. Layard, to go out with me for a few minutes and ascertain for certain that no accident has befallen this man—that is, if Miss Layard would not be afraid of being left alone for a little while? If my mind is not set at rest I know I shall not sleep a wink to-night."

"Afraid? Afraid of what, Mr. Crawford? Good gracious, I am not afraid of anything in the world," cried the girl, rising. "Of course Alfred will go with you."

Layard expressed his willingness, and in a short time the two men were out of the house in the dark lane, where burned only

one lamp at the end furthest from the main road.

"I do not know how we are to find out about this man," said Layard, as they turned from the blind street into Welford Road; "could you describe him?"

Layard thought Crawford must be a very excitable and somewhat eccentric man to allow himself to be troubled by a purely playful speech as to the pedestrian on the tow-path; but he felt he had been almost unjust to Crawford when talking to his sister, and he was anxious for this reason, and because of a desire to conciliate his lodger, to gratify him by joining in this expedition, which he looked on as absurd.

"Yes; I can describe him. He wore a black tail-coat, a round black hat, a black tie, and dark tweed trousers. He was nearer your height and build than mine. The chief things in his face are a long

straight nose, dark and very straight brows, and dark eyes. He has no colour in his cheeks."

Layard drew up in amazement.

"Do you mean to say," he asked with emphasis, "that you could see all this at such a distance?"

"I," the other answered with a second's hesitation—"I used a glass."

"O!" said Layard; and they resumed their walk, and nothing further was said until they came to the bridge, on which they stood looking up the tow-path, along which the pedestrian ought to have come.

Layard broke the silence.

"Unless we are to make a commotion, I don't see what we can do beyond asking the toll-man. The gate is shut now. It must be eleven o'clock, and this place owns an early-to-bed population."

He was now beginning to regret his too

easy participation in his lodger's absurd quest.

"Do not let us make any commotion, but just ask the toll-man quietly if such a man went through his gate," said Crawford hastily. "I know my uneasiness is foolish, but I cannot help it."

They turned from the parapet over which they had been looking, and Layard led the way a little down the road, and, then turning sharp to the right, entered the approach to the toll-house.

As they emerged from the darkness of the approach, the toll-taker was crossing the wharf or quay towards the gate. He passed directly under a lamp, and opened the gate which closed the path at the bridge.

Crawford caught Layard by the arm, and held him back, whispering:

"Wait!"

From the gloom of the arch a young man stepped out into the light of the lamp. He wore a black tailed-coat, a black tie, a black round hat, and dark tweed trousers. His nose was straight, and his brows remarkably dark and straight. Upon the whole, a young man of rather gloomy appearance.

"It's all right," whispered Crawford quickly into Layard's ear; "that's the man. Come away."

He drew his companion forcibly along the approach back to the road.

"It's well I didn't make a fool of myself," he whispered. "Come on quickly. I am ashamed even to meet this man after my childish fears."

They were clear of the approach, and retracing their steps over the bridge, before the pedestrian emerged from the darkness of the approach. When he gained Wel-

ford Road he went on straight—that is, in a direction opposite to that taken by the two.

"I am greatly relieved," said Crawford, rubbing his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief.

"I am not," thought Layard. "I am afraid there is something wrong with Crawford's upper storey."

CHAPTER V.

A SECOND APPARITION.

When Alfred Layard got back to the house he was far from easy in his mind about his lodger. In appearance Crawford was the least imaginative man in the world. His face, figure, and manner indicated extreme practicalness. No man could have less of the visionary or the seer about him. One would think he treated all things in life as a civil engineer treats things encountered in his profession. And yet here was this man giving way to absurd and sentimental timidity about nothing at all.

Of course, Layard himself would have been greatly shocked if he thought any harm had come to that solitary pedestrian

on the tow-path; but not one man in a thousand would have allowed the circumstance of the man's non-appearance and the jesting words he himself had used to occupy mind five minutes, to say nothing of suffering anxiety because of the circumstance, and sallying out to make inquiries and clear it up.

He did not bargain for such eccentricity as this when he agreed to live for a few days a month under the same roof with William Crawford. He would say nothing to Hetty of his fears, or rather uneasiness; but it would be necessary for him to suggest precautions.

When Crawford had bidden the brother and sister good-night finally, and the two were again alone in the front sitting-room, and Alfred had told Hetty, with no alarming comment, what had occurred since they left the house, she cried, "Now,

sceptic, what have you to say? Could anything be more humane or kind-hearted than the interest he took in that unknown man, a man he could absolutely have never seen once in all his life? You were in the act of implying that he saved the widow because she was rich, and married her because she was rich, when, lo! Sir Oracle, down comes Mr. Crawford to see what had happened to that man, the unknown man! Tell me, was *he* rich? Is *he* going to marry *him?*"

"I confess things look very black for my theory," said the brother from the couch, where he lay smoking placidly.

"I do believe," she cried with animation, "that you are rather sorry he turned out so nobly. I do believe you would rather he showed no interest in that man on the tow-path."

"Candidly, Hetty, I would."

"It is all jealousy on your part, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Are you?"

"No—o—o," he said slowly, "I can't say I am much ashamed of myself on that account."

"Then," she said, "it is worse not to repent than to sin, and your condition is something dreadful. Now, my impression is that Mr. Crawford never thought of money at all when he married his wife. I believe he married her for pure love, and the fact of her being an invalid was a reason for his loving her all the more. To me he is a Bayard," cried this enthusiastic young person with flushing cheek, and eyes in which the gold glinted more than ever.

"He's too stout, my dear," said the brother placidly from his couch.

"What!" cried she indignantly. "Too stout to marry for love! You are outrageous!"

"No; not to marry for love, but to be a Bayard. You know as well as I do our lodger would not cut a good figure on horseback," said the brother with calm decision.

"You are intolerable, Alfred, and I will not speak to you again on the subject. Nothing could be in worse taste than what you have been saying," said the girl, gathering herself daintily together and looking away from him.

"Besides, you do an injustice to our lodger."

"I wish, Alfred, if you find it necessary to refer to Mr. Crawford, that you would do so in some other way than by calling him our lodger. It is not respectful."

"Not respectful to whom?"

"To me," with a very stately inclination of the gallant little head.

"I see. Well, I will call him Mr.

Bayard," said the brother with provoking amiability.

"I am sure, Alfred, I do not know how you can be so silly."

"Evil communications, my dear."

"The gentleman's name is Crawford, and why should you not call him Crawford?"

"Just to avoid the monotony."

"And, I think, Alfred, to annoy me."

"Perhaps."

"Well, I must say that is very good-natured of you."

"But I aim at an identical result."

"I don't understand you."

"To avoid monotony, too. You are always so good-humoured and soft-tempered it is a treat to see you ruffled and on your dignity. But there, Hetty dear, let us drop this light-comedy sparring ——"

"I'm sure I don't think it's light comedy at all, but downright disagreeableness; and

I didn't begin it, and I don't want to keep it up, and I am sure you have a very clumsy and unkind notion of humour, if talking in that way is your idea of it."

"Remember, Hetty," he said, holding up his hand in warning, "you are much too big a girl to cry. You are a great deal too old to cry."

"A woman is never too old to cry—if she likes."

"She is, and you are, too old to cry for anything a brother may say to you. According to the usage of the best society you are too old to cry because of anything I may say to you. It will be your duty to repress your tears for your lover. According to good manners you ought not to shed a tear now until you have your first quarrel with your lover; and then, mind you, I am to hear nothing about it, or it would be my duty to call the scoundrel

out, when there is no knowing but he might injure or even kill me, and then you couldn't marry him, for he would be your brother's murderer; and if I killed him you couldn't marry him, because I should be his murderer; and I don't see of what use we could be to any one, except to write a tragedy about, and that is about as bad a use as you can put respectable people to."

The girl's face had been gradually clearing while Layard spoke, and by the time he had finished, all trace of annoyance had vanished from it, and she was bright and smiling once more.

"You are a queer old Alfred, and I am a fool to allow myself to grow angry with you or your nonsense. I of course said too much. I did not mean quite that I thought him a Bayard."

"He's much better-looking than the only portrait of the Chevalier I ever saw. I

must say the knight, by his portrait, is a most repulsive and unchivalrous brute, more fit for the Chamber of Horrors than the Hall of Kings. I assure you, Hetty, Mr. Crawford is a much better-looking man."

How was he to warn his sister without alarming her? To say he thought the man was not quite right in his mind would terrify Hetty, and it would not do to leave her without any caution. At last he could think of nothing but a most simple and most matter-of-course caution — that of locking the door of the room in which she and the child slept. "For," thought Layard, "if there is anything wrong with his head, although it may now be in the direction of excessive humanity, later it may change to be dangerously homicidal."

As they were saying "good-night," he remarked, as carelessly as he could:

"Remember, Hetty, although we are in our own house, still it is not all our own."

"Of course, I know that, Alfred."

"And if Fred cries, you must quiet him as quickly as possible."

"So that Mr. Crawford may not be disturbed?"

"Yes; and you may as well lock your door?"

"I will."

And thus they parted, and he felt at rest; for even if a paroxysm seized Crawford in the night, he could do no serious hurt without making noise enough to wake the others.

At the time that Layard was providing against a possible manaic in William Crawford, there was not a saner man within the four corners of London.

That night passed in perfect peace under the roof of Alfred Layard. So far as Lay-

ard knew, Crawford had slept the sleep of mental and bodily health, and little Freddie had not awakened once, as his aunt certified when she came down to breakfast.

Mrs. Grainger, the charwoman whose services were to be enlisted all the time Mr. Crawford was in the house, brought up his breakfast, and carried down news that the gentleman was arranging his papers and the rooms generally, as was only natural and to be expected upon a gentleman taking up his residence in a new lodging. Mr. Crawford she found very civil, but not inclined at all for conversation. He told Mrs. Grainger he should ring for her when he wanted her, and she took the liberty of explaining to the gentleman that he could not ring for her, because there was no bell. Upon this the gentleman said he should put his head over the balustrade and call to her, if she would

be good enough to favour him with her name; which she accordingly did, giving her Christian name and married name, and adding, with a view to defying fraud or personation, her maiden name (Wantage) also. The only piece of information he had volunteered to Mrs. Grainger, *née* Wantage, was that he had no intention of stirring out that day.

Layard did not renew the conversation of the night before. He was extraordinarily fond of his beautiful, sprightly, gentle-hearted sister, and he knew that his badinage had reduced her almost to tears. He was grave and tender, and devoted himself through most of breakfast to his lusty, restless, yellow-haired boy of three, little Freddie.

Alfred Layard's duties lay at the works, not the office, of the great Welford Gas Company. Hence, although his functions

were those of a clerk, he had not the hours of a clerk. Years ago the Layards had been in a position very different from that occupied by them now. Then their father had been a prosperous merchant in Newcastle, but a series of disasters had come upon him: a partner failed in another business, a bank broke, and the father's health gave way utterly, and he died leaving absolutely nothing behind him. Alfred was at Cambridge at the time of the crash. He left the University at once, and for some time failed to get anything to do. At length an old friend of his father's found him a situation worth a hundred and twenty pounds a year in the great Welford Gasworks. In a couple of years his salary was increased ten pounds a year, upon which joyful encouragement he married Lucy Aldridge, the penniless girl he had, before the

downfall of his father's house, resolved to make his wife.

For a little while he and his wife and sister lived very happily and contentedly on his modest hundred and thirty pounds a year. Then came little Freddie, and although it was an additional mouth to feed, any one of the three would have been without meat and butter from year's end to year's end rather than without baby Freddie. And when Freddie was a year old and could just syllable his mother's name, the ears of the poor young well-beloved mother were closed for ever in this life to the voice of her only sweetheart, Alfred, and her only child.

The brother and sister put her to rest with other dead in a great cemetery, and never once mentioned her name after that, although often when their loss was fresh upon them they would sit hand in hand

by the widowed hearth, weeping silently for the ease of their full and weary hearts.

The day following that on which the brother and sister took possession of Crawford's House, Layard felt less anxious about their lodger's condition of mind than he had the evening before. In the darkness of night and the strangeness of a new house and the loneliness of this deserted neighbourhood it had seemed as though Crawford was insane—might, in fact, at any moment develop into a dangerous maniac. In the sweet sunlight of a bright May morning the fears of the night before looked preposterous, and at very worst the lodger appeared to be no more than a fidgety, nervous, excitable man, with whom it would be a bore to live all one's life.

When his usual time came, Layard kissed his little son and his sister, and went off

to his business at the great gasworks with no fear or misgiving in his heart.

Mr. Crawford gave no indication of being a troublesome lodger. He had a simple breakfast, consisting of eggs and bacon and coffee, and in the middle of the day a simple dinner, consisting of a chop and potatoes, with bread-and-cheese and a bottle of stout. At tea he hadn't tea, but coffee again, and a lettuce and bread-and-butter. For a man with his income he was easily pleased, thought Hetty. He had found fault with nothing. In fact, he had said no word beyond the briefest ones that would convey his wishes, and when Mrs. Grainger asked if the food had been to his liking he had said simply, "It was all right, thank you." To that good lady he had imparted the impression that he was too much occupied with matters of the mind to give much heed to matters

of the body, and he had answered all her questions in a preoccupied and absent-minded manner.

After tea Mr. Crawford showed no sign of going out. He drew an easy-chair to the window, and sat down at the right-hand side of the embrasure, so as to command a view of the head of the island across which he had seen the man pass the evening before.

He heard Layard's knock and his voice below-stairs, but still he did not stir. From the place where he sat, any man coming along the tow-path at a walking pace would be in view a minute or a minute and a half before passing out of sight behind Boland's Ait. Crawford did not remove his eyes from that tow-path for any thirty consecutive seconds.

"I knew him at once," he whispered; "I knew him the minute I saw him. I

knew his build, his figure, his walk, the way he swings his hands—ay, his face, far off as he was—ay, his face, his accursed vengeful face."

He leaned forward. He judged, by the dying of the light and the shrouded rose-tint on the chimneys and upper walls of the houses in view, that it was growing near the hour at which the solitary man had appeared on the tow-path last evening.

"I wonder, if he saw me, would he recognise me? He thinks I am not in this country. He is not on the look-out for me. I am much changed since I saw him last." He passed his hand over his close-shaven face. "I had a beard and moustache then, and taking them off makes a great difference in a man's appearance—puts him almost beyond recognition. Then I have grown stouter—much stouter. I daresay my voice would betray me, and

then there is that St. Vitus's dance in my eyelids. That is an awful drawback. I am horribly handicapped; it isn't a fair race. And the worst of that jumping of my eyelids is that it always comes on me when I am most excited and least want it, and, moreover, when I am mostly unconscious of it until the excitement is over. Confound it! I *am* heavily handicapped."

He rested his elbow on the arm of the chair, and dropped his chin into his palm, keeping his eyes all the while fixed on that section of the tow-path visible beyond the head of the island.

"I," he went on in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible to himself, "was on the look-out for him when I recognised him. I knew he lived in Camberwell, and that Camberwell was in the neighbourhood; and when I knew that this tow-path goes to that place, I had a presentiment

he would come along that tow-path into my view. It might be called a superstition, I know, but I had the feeling, and it came true. He did come along that tow-path—he the man of all others on this earth I dread. But where did he delay? Where did he linger? Where did he hide himself? Layard said there was no place but in the canal, and I can see that the fence is too high for any man to scale without the aid of a ladder."

He rose and stood at the window, to command a better view of the scene.

"It seems unnatural, monstrous, that I should fear this Philip Ray more than Mellor. If I ought to be afraid of any one, it is Mellor; and yet I stand in no dread of him, because, no doubt ——"

He paused with his mouth open. He was staring at the tow-path.

A tall slender man had come into view

beyond the head of Boland's Ait. He was walking rapidly north, and swinging his arms as he moved.

"It is he!" whispered Crawford in a tone of fear.

He stood motionless by the window for a while—five, ten, fifteen minutes. The man did not reappear.

Crawford wiped his forehead, which had grown suddenly damp.

"At any cost I must find out the explanation of this unaccountable disappearance."

He went from the house and into the blind lane at the front of the house.

CHAPTER VI.

CRAWFORD'S INVESTIGATIONS.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD ascended the lane until he reached the high-road; then, turning sharply to the left, he went at a more leisurely pace towards the Welford Bridge.

He kept his eyes fixed ahead, and in every action of his body there was that vital alertness which characterised him in motion and even in repose. This alertness was more noticeable now than it had been before. Frequently, when he put down his foot in walking, he seemed dissatisfied with the ground upon which it had alighted, and shifted the foot slightly, but briskly and decisively while resting on it, and stepping

out with the other leg. He touched one thigh sharply with one hand, then the other thigh with the other hand, as though to assure himself that his hands and legs were within call, should he need their services for some purpose besides that upon which they were now employed. He rapped his chest with his fist, and thrust his thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket and brought forth nothing. In another man this would be called nervous excitement, but in William Crawford it did not arise from any unusual perturbation, but was the result of unutilised energy.

As he approached the bridge his pace fell to a saunter. He subdued his restlessness or manifestations of repressed activity. Nothing but his eyes showed extraordinary alertness, and they were fixed dead ahead. The houses on his left prevented his seeing the tow-path, and the hump-backed bridge

prevented his seeing where the approach from the toll-house joined the main road.

On the bridge lounged a group of loungers similar to that of the evening before. When Crawford had got over the middle of the bridge, and the road began to dip westward, he approached the parapet and looked up the canal. The long straight line ran off in the distance to a vanishing point, seeming to rise as it receded, but not a soul was visible from the spot at which he stood to the point at which the path disappeared.

Red Jim sidled up to where the stranger had paused, and after drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, by way of purifying himself before speaking to a man of property, said deferentially,

"Good-evening, guv'nor."

"Good-evening," said Crawford briskly,

sharply, in a tone which implied he would stand no familiarity or nonsense.

Red Jim pushed his hat over his eyes in token of acknowledging a rebuff; but he remained where he was in token of cherishing hope of a job, or anyway of money.

Crawford took a few paces further down the slope of the bridge. He did not care to speak in the hearing of all these men. Then he beckoned to Red Jim. The man came to him with alacrity.

"How long have you been here this evening?"

"Most of the evening. I'm out of work."

"You have been here half-an-hour?"

"Yes. A good bit more."

"Have you seen any one pass along the tow-path this way" (pointing) "in the last half-an-hour?"

"No."

"Did you see any one come along the path in that time?"

"Ay, I did."

Crawford paused a moment in thought. He laughed and said, "I have a little bet on. I betted that a man did come along the tow-path, but did not come off it at the bridge here. I was looking out of a window and saw him. My friend said it was impossible, as the man otherwise must go into the canal."

It was plain Crawford did not appear anxious about the man himself. It was only about a wager he cared.

"The man went across the canal."

"Across the canal!" cried Crawford in astonishment. "Do you mean over the bridge?"

"No."

"Then how did he get across the canal?"

"How much have you on it?" asked Red Jim. He was afraid his own interests might suffer if he gave all the information he possessed before making terms.

"Confound you! what is that to you?" cried Crawford angrily.

"Well, then, I'll tell you how he went across," said Red Jim, looking up straight over his head at the sky.

"How did he get over?" cried the other impatiently, as Jim showed no sign of speaking.

"He flew," said Jim, suddenly dropping his full prominent blue eyes on Crawford. "He flew, that's the way he got across the canal." And, thrusting his hands deep into his wipe-open trousers pockets, he began moving slowly away.

For a moment Crawford looked as if he could kill Ford. Then, with a sudden quick laugh, he said:

"O, I understand; I will make it worth a tanner for you."

Red Jim was back by his side in a moment. He stretched out his arm, and, pointing towards the tail of the island, said:

"Do you see that floating stage?"

"Floating stage? No. What is a floating stage?"

"Two long pieces of timber with planks across. Don't you see it at the tail of Boland's Ait?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, that's the way he got over. That was drawn by a chain across the canal to the tow-path. He got on it, and then drew it back to the Ait, do you see? So you've won your money, guv'nor."

Crawford's face grew darker and darker, as the explanation proceeded. He handed Jim the promised coin in silence, turned back upon the way he had come, and began

retracing his steps at a quick rate. His eyes winked rapidly, and he muttered curses as he walked.

"Can it be — can it possibly be that Philip Ray is my next-door neighbour? Incredible! And yet that was Philip Ray, as sure as I am alive, and he went to this island! Can this Robinson Crusoe be Philip Ray? If so, I cannot keep on here. I must find some other place for my—business. This is not exactly Camberwell, and I heard Ray lives in Camberwell; but this is very near it. Very near Camberwell!"

When he reached Crawford Street he diminished his speed. It was plain he did not want to seem in a hurry. As soon as he gained the house he ascended the stairs at once to his own room. He closed the door, and began walking up and down, hastily muttering unconnected words.

After a while he went to the window and looked out on Boland's Ait with an expression in which hatred and fear were blended.

The buildings on the island consisted of an old sawmill, from which the machinery had been removed, now falling into ruin; a couple of dilapidated sheds, with tarred wooden roofs; a yard in which once the timber had been piled in stacks higher than the engine-house itself; and a small four-roomed house, formerly used as the dwelling-place of the foreman. These buildings and the wall of the yard rose between Crawford and the tow-path. The island itself was on a level with the ground on which Crawford's House stood; and William Crawford's sitting-room, being on the first floor, did not overpeer even the wall of the yard: hence the view of the tow-path was cut off except at the head and the tail of Boland's Ait.

William Crawford bit his under lip and gnawed the knuckle of his left forefinger, and plucked at his shaven cheek and upper lip as though at whiskers and moustache. At last he dropped his hand, and remained motionless, as though an idea had struck him and he was considering it. Suddenly he raised his head like one who has made up his mind, and walked with a quick step to the door, and, opening it, went out on the landing. He leaned over the balustrade and called out:

"Mrs. Grainger, will you come up, please? I want to speak to you for a minute."

Mrs. Grainger hastened from the kitchen. She had the sleeves of her washed-out lilac cotton dress rolled up above her arms, and an enormous apron, once white, now mottled and piebald with innumerable marks and stains.

"Will you sit down a moment?" Crawford said, pointing to a chair. He walked up and down the room during the interview.

Mrs. Grainger sat down and threw her apron over to her left side, by way of qualifying herself for the honour of a seat in Mr. Crawford's room and in Mr. Crawford's presence.

"Miss Layard told me last evening some interesting facts you mentioned to her about a—gentleman who lives on this island here in the canal."

"Yes, sir. A Mr. Bramwell, who lives all alone on Boland's Ait."

"Exactly. Do you know anything about him? The case is so remarkable, I am interested in it merely out of curiosity."

"I know, sir; and he is a curiosity, certainly," said Mrs. Grainger, settling herself firmly on her chair, and arranging her

mind as well as her body for a good long chat, for every minute devoted to which she would be receiving her pay.

Crawford caught the import of her gesture, and said sharply:

"I do not wish to keep you long, Mrs. Grainger; I have only a few questions to ask, and then you may leave me."

"Yes, sir," said the charwoman, instantly sitting upright and on her dignity.

"Have you ever seen this strange man?"

"Only twice."

"Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"O, yes, sir, I should know him anywhere."

"Tell me what he is like."

"Quite the gentleman, sir, he looks, but seems to be poor, or he wouldn't live in such a place all by himself and wear such poor clothes."

"His clothes are poor, then?"

"Very. But not so much poor as worn shabby, sir."

"Ah," said Crawford thoughtfully. He had not been near enough to that man on the tow-path to tell whether his clothes were greatly the worse of wear or not. "Is he dark or light?"

"Dark. Very dark. His hair is jet-black, sir. I was as close to him on Welford Road as I am to you now."

Philip Ray was dark. "Did you notice anything remarkable about him?"

"Well, as I said, he is very dark, and he has no colour in his cheek."

"H'm!" said Crawford in a dissatisfied tone. Ray had no colour in his cheek. "Did you remark anything peculiar in his walk?" No one could fail to observe the way in which Ray swung his hands.

"No, I did not."

Crawford drew up in front of the woman, and stood gnawing his knuckle for a few seconds. Then he resumed his pacing up and down.

"Was the gentleman walking fast at the time?"

"No."

Philip Ray, when alone, always went at an unusually rapid pace. He was a man quick in everything: quick in speech, in the movements of his limbs, quickest of all and most enduring also in his love and —anger.

"Is he a tall man?"

"No."

"What!" cried he in astonishment, drawing up again in front of the charwoman, now somewhat cowed by Crawford's abrupt, and vigorous, and abstracted manner. "Don't you call six feet a tall man? Have you lived among Patagonians all your life?"

"No, sir; I can't say I ever lived with any people of that name," she said, bridling a little. She did not understand being spoken to by any one in that peremptory and belittling way, and if all came to all it wasn't the rich Mr. Crawford who paid her and supplied the food she had eaten, but poor Mr. Layard, who gave himself no airs, but was always a pleasant gentleman, though he was not in the counting-house of the great Welford Gas Company, but in the works, where her own husband was employed.

"Why, don't you consider a man four inches taller than I a tall man?" cried Crawford, drawing brows down over his quick furtive eyes, and looking at the woman as if he was reproaching her with having committed a heinous crime.

"Four inches taller than you!" said the woman with scornful asperity. "I never

said he was four inches taller than you, sir. He isn't four inches taller than you, Mr. Crawford."

"He is."

"Excuse me, sir; if you tell me so, of course I have nothing more to say," said Mrs. Grainger, rising with severity and dignity. "The gentleman that lives on Boland's Ait is a *shorter* man than you, sir."

"Are you sure?" said Crawford, standing for the third time in front of the woman.

"Quite certain."

"*Shorter* than I?" said he, in a tone of abstraction, as he gnawed his knuckles, unconscious of her presence—"*shorter* than I?" he repeated, lost in thought. "Then he can't be Philip Ray," he cried in a tone of relief. The words were uttered, not for Mrs. Grainger's hearing, but for his own. He wanted to have this pleasant assurance in his ear as well as in his mind.

"I never said he was, sir; I said he was Mr. Bramwell—Mr. Francis Bramwell," said Mrs. Grainger, making a mock courtesy and moving towards the door.

With a start Crawford awoke from his abstraction to the fact of her presence. "Bless my soul! but of course you didn't! Of course you didn't! You never said anything of the kind! You never said anything of any kind! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" He laughed his short and not pleasant laugh, and held the door open for Mrs. Grainger.

When she was gone he walked up and down the room for some time in deep cogitation. Then he went to the window and looked out on the scene, now darkening for the short night. His eyes rested on Boland's Ait, and he muttered below his breath:

"Whoever my next-door neighbour may be, it is not Philip Ray, and I am not afraid

of any one else on earth. But who is this Francis Bramwell that Philip Ray visits? Who can he be?" Crawford paused awhile, and then said impatiently as he turned away from the window, "Bah, what do I care who it is? I fear no one but Philip Ray."

CHAPTER VII.

A VISITOR AT BOLAND'S AIT.

On the evening that Crawford arrived for the first time at the house called after his name, and saw the man he recognised as Philip Ray hastening along the tow-path, the man of whom he expressed such fear was almost breathless when, having passed the head of the Ait, he was hidden from view. As soon as he got near the tail of the island he suddenly stopped, bent down, and seizing a small chain made fast to an iron ring below the level of the tow-path and close to the water, drew heavily upon it, hand over hand. Gradually a long low black floating mass began to detach itself from the island, and, like some huge snake

or saurian, stretch itself out across the turbid waters, now darkening in the shadows of eve. This was the floating stage of which Red Jim had told Crawford.

When the stage touched the bank Philip Ray stepped on it, walked to the other end, stooped down to the water, and, catching another chain, drew the stage back. Then he stepped ashore on Boland's Ait.

He paused a moment to gather breath and wipe his forehead, for in his wild haste he had run half the way from Camberwell. With rapid steps and arms swinging he strode to the door of what had once been the foreman's cottage, and knocked hastily. Then he made a great effort, and forced himself into an appearance of calm.

There was the sound of some one rising inside. The door swung open, and a man of thirty slightly under the middle height stood facing the failing light of day.

"Philip," he said. "Philip, I did not expect to see you so soon again. Come in."

On a table littered with papers a reading-lamp was already burning, for even at the brightest hour the light in the small oblong room was not good. By the table stood a Windsor armchair; another stood against the wall furthest from the door. There was a tier of plain bookshelves full of books against one of the walls, a few heavy boxes against another, and absolutely nothing else in the place. The cottage stood at the head of the island, and the one window of the occupant's study looked up the canal in the direction of Camberwell.

"At work, as usual," said Ray, pointing to the papers on the table as he shut the door.

"My work is both my work and my play, my meat and my rest. Sit down, Philip.

Has anything unusual happened? I did not expect to see you until Sunday," said the solitary man, dropping into his chair, resting his elbows on the arms of it and leaning forward.

"I am out of breath. I ran most of the way," said Ray, avoiding the question.

"Ran!" cried the other in faint surprise. "Your walking is like another man's running. Your running must be terrific. I never saw you run. What made you run this evening?" He smiled very slightly as he spoke of Ray's walking and running.

"I am out of breath," said the other, again shirking the question. "Give me a minute."

It was not to gain breath Philip Ray paused, but to put in shape what he had to say. He had come from Camberwell at the top of his speed because he was burning with intelligence which had just reached

him. He had been so excited by the news that he had never paused to think of the form in which he should communicate it, and now he was in great perplexity and doubt.

Francis Bramwell threw himself back in his chair in token of giving the required respite. He was a pale broad-browed man, with large, grave, unfathomable, hazel eyes. His hair and moustache were dark brown; his cheeks and chin, clean-shaven.

Ray fidgeted a good deal in his chair, and acted very badly the man who was out of breath.

"You must have run desperately hard," said Bramwell, at length, in a tone half sympathy, half banter.

"Never harder in all my life," said the other, placing his hand on his side, as though still suffering from the effects of his unusual speed.

After a while he sat up and said, "I was pretty tired to begin with. I had been wandering about all the afternoon, and when I found myself near home I made up my mind not to budge again for the night. I found a letter waiting for me, and I have come over about that letter." He ceased to speak, and suppressed the excitement which was shaking him.

"A letter!" said Bramwell, observing for the first time that something very unusual lay behind the manner of the other. "It must have been a letter of great importance to bring you out again, and at such a rate, too." He looked half apprehensively at his visitor.

"It was a letter of importance."

A spasm of pain shot over the face of Bramwell, and his brows fell. "A letter of importance that concerned me?" he asked in a faint voice.

"Well," after a pause, "partly."

Bramwell's lips grew white, and opened. He scarcely breathed his next question: "From *her?*"

"O, no!" answered Ray quickly.

"About her?"

"No."

Bramwell fell back in his chair with a sigh of relief. "I thought the letter was about her. I thought you were preparing me to hear of her death," said he tremulously, huskily.

"I am sorry to say you were wrong. That would be the best news we could hear of her," said Ray bitterly.

"Yes, the very best. What does the letter tell you that affects me?'

"It is about *him*," answered Ray, with fierce and angry emphasis on the pronoun.

"What does the letter say?"

"That he is in England."

"Ah! Where?"

"In Richmond."

"So near!"

"Who saw him?"

"Lambton."

"Beyond all chance of mistake?"

"Beyond all chance of mistake, although he has shaved off his whiskers and moustache. Lambton saw him on the railway platform, and recognised him at once. Lambton had no time to make any inquiries, as his train was just about to move when he recognised the villain standing alone. But *I* have plenty of time for inquiries, and shall not miss one. I'll shoot him as I would a rabid dog."

"The atrocious scoundrel!"

"When I read the letter I only waited to put this in my pocket."

He took out a revolver and laid it on the table.

Then for a while both men sat staring at one another across the table, on which lay the weapon. At length Bramwell rose and began pacing up and down the room with quick, feverish steps. Ray had not seen him so excited for years—not since his own sister Kate, the solitary man's wife, had run away, taking her baby, with that villain John Ainsworth, whom Edward Lambton had seen at Richmond. After the first fierce agony of the wound, the husband had declined to speak of her flight or of her to his brother-in-law. He plunged headlong into gambling for a time until all his ample means were dissipated, unless Boland's Ait are enough to keep body and soul together. Then his grief took another turn. He was lost to all his former friends for months, and at last took up his residence, under an assumed name—Francis Bramwell instead of Frank Mellor—on Boland's Ait, in the South

London Canal. To not a living soul did he disclose his real name or his place of habitation but to Philip Ray, the brother of his guilty wife, and the sworn avenger of her shame and his dishonour.

Ray watched Bramwell with flashing, uneasy eyes. By a desperate effort he was calming his own tumultuous passions.

At last Bramwell wound his arms round his head, as though to shut out some intolerable sight, to close his ears to some maddening sounds, to shield his head from deadly, infamous blows.

"Bear with me, Philip!" he cried huskily, at length. "Bear with me, my dear friend. I am half mad—whole mad for the moment. Bear with me! God knows, I have cause to be mad."

He was staggering and stumbling about the room, avoiding by instinct the table on which the lamp burned.

Ray said nothing, but set his teeth and breathed hard between them.

"I did not think," went on Bramwell, unwinding his arms and placing his hands before his face, as he went on unsteadily to and fro, "that anything could break me down as this has done. I thought I had conquered all weakness in the matter. I cannot talk quite steadily yet. Bear with me awhile, Philip!"

The younger man hissed an imprecation between his set teeth.

Bramwell took down his hands from his face and tore the collar of his shirt open.

"What you told me," he resumed in a gentler voice, a voice still shaken by his former passion of wrath, as the sea trembles after the wind has died away, "brought it all back upon me again. How I worshipped her! How I did all

in my power to make her love me! How I hoped in time she would forget her young fancy for him! I thought if she married me I could not fail to win her love, and then when the child was born I felt secure. But the spell of his evil fascination was too strong for her feeble will, and—and—and he had only to appear and beckon to her to make her leave me for ever; and to go with *him* —with such a man as John Ainsworth! O God!"

Ray drew a long breath, brought his lips firmly together, but uttered no word. His eyes were blazing, and his hands clutched with powerful strenuousness the elbows of his chair.

"I am calmer now," resumed Bramwell.

"I am not," breathed Ray, in a whisper of such fierceness and significance that

the other man arrested his steps and regarded the speaker in a dazed way, like one awakening from sleep in unfamiliar surroundings.

"I am not calmer now," went on Ray, in the same whisper of awful menace, "unless it is calmer to be more than ever resolved upon revenge."

"Philip——"

"Stop! I must have my say. You have had yours. Have I no wrongs or sorrow? Am I not a partner in this shame thrust upon us?"

"But——"

"Frank, I will speak. You said a while ago, 'Bear with me.' Bear you now with me."

Bramwell made a gesture that he would hear him out.

"In the first wild burst of your anger you would have strangled this miscreant

if you could have reached his throat with your thumbs—would you not?"

He was now speaking in his full voice, in tones charged with intense passion.

"I was mad then."

"No doubt; and I am mad still—now. I have never ceased to be mad, if fidelity to my oath of vengeance is madness. You know I loved her as the apple of my eye, and guarded her as the priceless treasure of my life; for we were alone—she was alone in the world only for me. Him I knew and loathed. I knew of his gambling, his dishonourableness, his profligacy. I knew she was weak and flighty, vain and headlong, open to the wiles of a flatterer, and I shuddered when I found she had even met him once, and I forbade her ever to meet him again. She promised, and although my mind was not at rest, it was quieted somewhat. Then you came. I knew you

were the best and loyalest and finest-souled man of them all. Let me speak. Bear with me a little while."

"My life is over. Let me be in such peace as I may find." Bramwell walked slowly up and down the room with his head bowed and his eyes cast on the floor.

"And why is your life over—at thirty? Because of him and his ways of devilish malice; he cared for her really nothing at all. When he came the second time, a year after the marriage, he set his soul upon ruining you and her. He thought of nothing else. Do not stop me. I will go on. I will have it out for once. You would never listen to me before. Now you shall—you shall!"

He was speaking in a loud and vehement voice, and swinging his arms wildly round him as he sat forward on his chair.

"Go on."

"Well, I liked you best of all; you had everything in your favour: position, money, abilities, even years. You were younger than the scoundrel, and quite as good-looking. You had not his lying smooth tongue for women, or his fine sentiment for their silly ears. I thought all would be well if she married you. She did, and all went well for a year, until he came back, and then all went wrong, and she stole away out of your house, taking your child with her."

"I know—I know; but spare me. I have only just said most of this myself."

"No doubt; but I must say what is in my heart—what has been in my heart for years. Well, we know he deserted her after a few months. He left her and her child to starve in America, the cowardly ruffian! What I have had in my mind to say for years, Frank, is that of all the men in this

world, I love and esteem you most; that I love and esteem you more than all the other men in this world put together, and that it drives me mad to think shame and sorrow should have come upon you through my blood."

"Do not speak of her, Philip. What has been done cannot be undone."

"No; but the shame which has come upon you through my blood can be washed out in his, and by ——, it shall! and here I swear it afresh."

With a sudden movement forward he flung himself on his knees and threw his open right hand up, calling Heaven to witness his oath.

Bramwell paused in his walk. The two men remained motionless for a moment. Suddenly Bramwell started. There was a loud knocking at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

FATHER AND SON.

Ray rose to his feet and bent forward.

"I did not know you expected any visitor," said he in a tone of strong irritation.

"I do not expect any visitor. I never have any visitor but you," said Bramwell, looking round him in perplexity, as though in search of an explanation of the sound. He was beginning to think that his ears must have deceived him, and that the knock had not been at the door. "Did you," he asked, "draw back the stage when you got here?"

"Yes, but I did not fasten it. Any one on the tow-path might have pulled it across

again. I hope no one has been eavesdropping."

"Eavesdropping! No. Who would care to eavesdrop at *my* door?"

"He!"

"Philip, you are mad? If you trifle with your reason in this way you will hurt it permanently. I do not believe there was any knock at all. It may have been a stone thrown by some boy from the towpath."

"Well, open the door and see. There can be no harm in doing that."

Ray stretched out his hand to recover the revolver which he had placed on the table. Bramwell snatched it up, saying:

"What folly, Philip! I will have no nonsense with such tools as this. We are in England—not the West of America." He dropped the revolver into the pocket of his jacket.

The minds of both men had been so concentrated on the idea of John Ainsworth during this interview that neither would have felt much surprise to find him on the threshold. Bramwell had repudiated Ray's suggestion that Ainsworth was there, but in his heart he was not sure of his own assertion. Nothing on earth could be more monstrously improbable than that Ainsworth would come and knock at *that* door; but then neither of the men in the room was in full possession of his reasoning powers. While Bramwell had lived on Boland's Ait no caller but Philip Ray had ever knocked at that door before, and now —now there came a knock while Philip Ray was sitting in the room, and as they had heard of Ainsworth's presence in England, and at the very moment Philip Ray was swearing to take that reprobate's life. Reason said it was absurd to suppose Ains-

worth could be there. Imagination said he might; and if he were found there while Philip was in this fury, what direful things might not happen? Now that Bramwell had the revolver in his possession he felt more assured.

He moved to the door, opened it, and looked out.

No figure rose between him and the deep dusk of night. The light from the lamp on the table passed out through the doorway, and shone upon the wall of the old engine-house opposite.

"There is no one. It must have been a stone," said Bramwell, relieved, and drawing back.

"A stone cannot hit twice. There were two knocks. I heard two quite distinctly. Go out and look around. Or stay, I'll go. Give me back my revolver."

"No, no. Stay where you are. I will see."

He was in the act of stepping forth, when, looking down, he suddenly perceived the figure of a little child in the doorway. With a cry, "What is this?" he sprang back into the middle of the room.

Ray shouted, "Is the villain there? I told you it was Ainsworth!"

Ray was about to pass Bramwell at a bound, when the latter seized him and held him back, and, pointing to the child in the doorway, whispered, "Look!"

Ray peered into the gloom, and then came forward a pace warily, as though suspecting danger. "A child!" he cried in a whisper. "A little child! How did he come here? Do you know anything of him?"

"No." Bramwell shuddered and drew back until he could reach the support of the table, on which he rested his hand.

Ray advanced still further, and, bending

his tall thin figure, asked in a muffled voice, "Who are you, my little man? and what have you got in your hand?" The child held something white in a hand which he extended to Ray.

The child did not answer, but crossed the threshold into the full light of the lamp, still offering the white object, which now could be seen to be a letter.

"What is you name, my little man?" repeated Ray, with a look of something like awe on his face.

"Don't!" whispered Bramwell, backing until he reached his chair. "Don't! Can't you see his name?"

"No. I am not able to make out what is on the paper at the distance. Give me the paper, my little lad."

Bramwell knew what the name of the child was, and Ray had a tumultuous and superstitious feeling that the coming of

this child across the water in the night to the lonely islet and this solitary man had some portentous significance.

Ray took the letter from the child, and read the superscription with dull sight. Then he said, turning to Bramwell, "This does not explain how you know his name. There is nothing on this but,

'Francis Bramwell, Esq.
Boland's Ait,
South London Canal.'

What is your name? Tell me your name, my little man."

"Frank," said the child in a frightened voice.

"Yes. What else?"

"Mellor."

"What!" shouted Ray, catching up the boy from the floor and holding the little face close to the lamp.

"Did not you see his name on his face? Look! Is it not her face? Philip, I am suffocating!"

Ray gazed at the child long and eagerly. Bramwell, swaying to and fro by his chair, kept his eyes on the rosy face of the boy. The boy blinked at the light, and looked from one man to the other with wide-open, unconcerned eyes. At length Ray put the little fellow on the floor. The boy went to the table and began looking at the papers spread upon it. From his self-possessed, unabashed manner, it was plain he was well accustomed to strangers.

"Who brought you here?" asked Ray again. The other man seemed bereft of voice and motion, save the long swaying motion, which he mechanically tried to steady by laying hold of the arm of the chair.

"A man," answered the child, running

his chubby young fingers though some papers.

"Where did you come from?"

"Mother," answered the child.

"Who is mother?"

The boy looked round in smiling surprise.

"Mother *is* mother," and he laughed at the notion of grown-up people not knowing so simple a thing as that his mother was mother. He was thoroughly at his ease—quite a person of the world.

"You had better open the letter," said Ray, holding it out to Bramwell. "I did not recognise the writing. It is not like what I remember, and it is in pencil."

Bramwell took the letter. His face worked convulsively as he examined it. "I should not recognise the writing either, and yet it could be no other than hers, once you think of her and look at it." He

turned the unopened envelope round and round in his hand. "What is the good of opening this, Philip? It will make no difference in me. I shall never look at her of my own free-will again."

"How can you judge the good of opening it unless you know what it contains? You cannot send it back by this messenger. My little lad," he said, turning to the child, who was still moving his dimpled fingers through the confused mass of papers on the table, "where is the man that brought you here?"

"Gone away," answered the child, without suspending his occupation.

"He left you at the door and knocked and went away?"

The boy nodded.

"He brought you across the water and set you down and knocked, and went back across the water?"

"Went back across the water," repeated the boy.

"What did he do then?"

"Ran off."

"You see, Frank," said Ray to the other man, "you cannot send back the letter by the messenger who brought it."

"Shall I throw it into the canal? I made up my mind never to know anything about her again in this life," said Bramwell.

Ray put his hand on the child's head and said, "Where did you leave your mother?"

"At home."

"Where?"

"A long way."

"Do you know where?"

"Yes; in bed."

Bramwell tore open the envelope, read the letter, handed it to Ray, and flung him-

self into his chair. The note, written in pencil like the address on the cover, ran:

"May 28.

"FRANK,—I have found out where you are after long search. I ask nothing for myself—not even forgiveness. But our child, your little son, will be alone and penniless when I die, which the doctor tells me must be before morning. I have enough money to pay all expenses. It is not his money, but money made by myself—by my singing. You may remember my voice was good. I shall be dead before morning, the doctor tells me. There will be money enough for my funeral, but none for my child. He is very young—I forget exactly how old, for my head is burning hot, and my brain on fire. He is called after you, for you used to be kind to me when I was at Beechley before I was

married to Frank Mellor. You remember him? This is a question you can never answer, because I hear in my ears that I shall die before morning. The money for my funeral is in my box. I am writing this bit by bit, for my head is on fire, and now and then I cannot even see the paper, but only a pool of flame, with little Frank —my baby Frank—on the brim, just falling in, and I cannot save him. I am writing my will. This is my will. I think I have nothing more to say. I wish I could remember all I have said, but I am not able; and I cannot read, for when I try, the paper fills with fire. It is easier to write than to read I am better now. My head is cooler. It may not be cool again between this and morning, and then it will be cold for ever. [I have money enough for myself when I am dead.] Take my boy, take our child. Take my only little

one—all that is left to me. I do not ask you to forgive me. Curse me in my grave, but take the child. You are a good man, and fear and love God. My child is growing dim before my dying eyes. I could not leave him behind when I fled your house. I cannot leave him behind now, and yet I must go without him. I know you are bound in law to provide for him. That is not what I mean. Take him to your heart as you took me once. I love him ten thousand times more than I ever loved myself, or ever loved you. I can give you nothing more, for I am not fit to bless you. The pool of flame again! But I have said all.

"KATE."

Ray had read the letter standing by the table, and with his back to the chair into which Bramwell had sunk. When he finished he turned slowly round and fixed

his gaze on the child. A feeling of delicacy and profound sympathy made him avoid the eyes of the other man. The dying woman was his sister, but she was this man's wife. A little while ago he had said that death would well befit her; and yet now, when, as in answer to his words, he read her own account of the death sentence passed upon her, he felt a pang of pity for her and remorse for his words. For a moment his mind went back to their orphaned childhood, and his love and admiration of his sister Kate's beauty. He had to banish the pictures ruthlessly from his mind, or he would have broken down. Silence any longer preserved would only afford a gateway to such thoughts; so he said, as he placed his hand once more on the head of the boy:

"She was delirious, or half-delirious, when she wrote this."

"Philip, she was dying."

"Yes. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. The boy said he came a long way, and that whoever brought him ran away. It is plain she has taken precautions to conceal her hiding-place. Let things be as they are. They are best so."

He spoke like a man in a dream. He was half stunned. It seemed to him that all this had passed in some dreary long ago, and that he was only faintly recalling old experiences, not living among words and facts and surroundings subsisting to-day.

"And what about——?" Ray finished the sentence by pointing with his free hand at the boy.

"Eh? About what?"

Bramwell's eyes were looking straight before him far away.

"About our young friend here?"

"She has been careful to remind me of

my legal responsibility. I have no choice. Besides, putting the question of legality aside, I have no desire to escape from the charge, though I am ill-suited to undertake it, and do not know how I shall manage. He is, of course, a stranger to me. He was a mere baby when last I saw him. I cannot think of this matter now. I am thick-blooded and stupid with memories and sorrows."

Ray groaned, and began pacing up and down the room. The child, always self-possessed, had now gathered courage and was slowly making the circuit of the table, holding on by the rim, and now and then turning over some of the papers: plainly a child accustomed to amuse himself.

Neither of the men spoke. Bramwell sat stupefied in his chair. Ray strode up and down the room with hasty steps.

The child pursued his course round the

table. On the table was nothing but papers, and the lamp inaccessible in the middle, the pens and an ink-bottle unattainable near the lamp. When the circuit of the table was completed, and was found to afford nothing but dull papers, with not even one picture among them, the little feet ceased to move. One hand laid hold of the leaf, the white blue-veined temple was rested on the soft pad made by the plump tiny hand, and the young voice said with a weary yawn, "Frank's tired. Frank wants to go to mother." As the boy spoke he sank down to the floor, overcome by drowsiness and fatigue.

Ray hastened to the child and raised him from the ground, and held him tenderly in his arms. "Poor little man! Poor tired little motherless man!"

"Mother!" murmured the boy, "I want to go to mother!" The child smiled, and

nestled into the breast of the tall powerful man. "Frank wants mother and wants to go to bed."

"Hush, my boy: Frank has no mother."

Then a sudden impulse seized Ray. He crossed the room with the little lad in his arms, and placed him in the arms of Bramwell, saying to the child:

"You cannot go to your mother: you have no mother any longer. But you have a father. Take him, Frank; he is not to blame."

Bramwell caught the boy to his breast, and stooped and kissed his round soft young cheek, and pressed him again to his bosom, and then all at once handed him back to Ray, saying, in a choking voice:

"I am distracted, overwhelmed. I cannot stand this. What do I want here—alive?"

He rose and began stumbling about the

room as if on the point of falling. Suddenly something heavy in his coat struck the table and shook it. A gleam of joy shot over his face, illumining it as though he stood within the light of deliverance.

Swift as thought he drew the revolver from his pocket and placed it against his forehead. With a cry of horror, Ray struck his arm up, dropped the child, and seizing Bramwell's wrist, wrenched the weapon from his grasp.

"It is *you* who are mad now!" he cried angrily. "What do you mean? Does all your fine morality vanish at the contact with pain and disgrace? For shame, Frank! for shame! You were always a man. What unmans you now? This," he added, dropping the revolver into his own pocket, "is safer in my keeping than in yours. I intended to do only justice with it; you would commit a crime."

"I am calmer now," said Bramwell; "it was only the impulse of a moment. Forgive me, Philip! forgive me, Heaven! I was frenzied. I hardly remember what passed since—since the boy came and I read that letter, and saw her ruin and death, and tasted the ashes of my own life upon my lips. I am calm—quite calm now. I will do my duty by the child. Trust me, I will not give way again; although I am not much safer without the revolver than with it. I have as deadly a weapon always at hand."

"What is that? I did not know you kept any weapon in the place."

"I keep no weapon in the place; but," he went to the window looking south along the canal, "all round me is—the water."

Shortly after this Philip Ray left, promising to call next evening. It was after this interview that Layard and Craw-

ford saw him emerge from the gloom of the arch of Welford Bridge, the night that Crawford entered upon the tenancy of his rooms in Crawford's House, on Crawford's Bay, opposite Boland's Ait, and hard by the flooded ice-house, Mrs. Crawford's property.



CHAPTER IX.

CRAWFORD'S HOME.

The third and last day of William Crawford's visit to Welford was devoted to the business of his wife's property. The rents had not been collected for a couple of months, and before he returned in the evening he had upwards of a hundred pounds in his possession. Some of the tenants paid quarterly; the rents of the smaller ones were due weekly, but it had been the custom of the estate not to apply for the latter until four weeks outstanding. The neighbourhood, though poor, was for a place of its class eminently solvent, owing to the gas-house and the railway. Of course there was no difficulty with the stores. or

wharves, or yards, or better class of houses; and even the poorer tenants could not afford to get into arrears or treat a landlord unjustly, for such matters might come to the ears of either of the great companies, and do the delinquent harm.

It was almost sundown when Crawford reached his lodgings. Layard had come in and gone out again, and Hetty was alone in their sitting-room. She had just come down from little Freddie, who, after a valiant fight against Billy Winkers, had at last succumbed. Crawford saw Hetty at the window, and motioned that he wished to speak with her.

"Mr. Layard out?" asked he, after greetings.

"Yes," said the girl; "the evening was so lovely, he said he'd go for a walk."

"The evening is lovely, no doubt," said he; "but is there such a thing as

a tolerable walk within reasonable distance?"

Hetty had opened the sitting-room door, and now stood on the threshold.

"There is no nice walk quite close, but Alfred often goes for a stroll to Greenwich Park. That is not far off, you know, and the air there is so sweet and pure after the heat and unpleasantness of the works all day."

She thought he was speaking merely out of politeness, and, believing he wished to be gone, drew back a little into the room.

He was in no great hurry to go upstairs. He knew what her movement indicated, but he construed it differently.

"Am I invited to enter?" he asked suavely, bowing slightly, and making a gesture of gallant humility with his arms and shoulders.

"Certainly," she said, smiling and making way for him. He did look a powerful man,

she thought, who could dare danger, and rescue and carry out of the flames an invalid woman. He was not very handsome, it was true, and there was something unusual about his restless eyes. But perhaps that might be quite usual with heroes. She had never before met a man who had rescued any one from death. She had not, that she could remember, ever met a man, either, who had married a widow. According to plays and satirists, the man who married a widow had more courage than the man who would do no more than face death in a burning house.

"I am sorry to have to trouble you about a little business matter—no, thank you, I will not sit down, I shall run away in a minute—but, as your brother is out, I fear I must intrude on your good nature, if you will allow me."

His voice and manner were exceedingly

soft and pleasant and insinuating; not in the least like his voice and manner of the former evening, when his manner was abrupt and his voice hard, if not harsh. This speech somewhat disconcerted the girl. She felt sure he was going to ask her to do something altogether beyond her abilities.

"Anything in my power, Mr. Crawford, I shall be very happy to do for you."

"Thank you extremely. It is exceedingly kind of you to say so." He spoke as though weighed down by a sense of his own unworthiness.

The girl began to feel embarrassed. Such profuse thanks rendered in anticipation placed the obligation of gratitude on her shoulders. His words and manner and gestures had already thanked her more than sufficiently for anything she could do for him.

"I am going out this evening," he said, "and shall not be back until very late—an hour too late even to mention to any well-ordered person—and I do not wish to disturb any one when I come back."

"We, Alfred and I, always sit up very late."

"My dear Miss Layard, you could have no conception of the time at which I may return. It may be three, four, five o'clock. I have to go to see an old friend in the West End, and he will, in all likelihood, keep me until the cocks have crowed themselves hoarse in full daylight."

"Well," said she, gathering her brows and looking very uncomfortable as she felt how helpless she was in a case of such mystery and difficulty, "what can Alfred or I do for you?"

The grave aspect and manner of apology left his face and gestures all at once, and he

smiled, and with a light airy, humorous manner said, "If there is such a thing as a latchkey, and your brother hasn't it with him, will you lend it to me?"

The girl burst out laughing, partly from relief and partly from enjoyment of this elaborate joke, and, going to the chimney-piece, handed him from it a key. "We had to get a new latch. Alfred has one key. This is for you."

"Thank you. Good-night." And he went, shutting the door softly after him.

William Crawford went to his own room and took off the quiet, sedate, and somewhat shabby clothes in which he had arrived at Welford. He washed, put on a fresh shirt and elegant lace boots, of much finer make and more shiny than he had worn all day. He substituted a coloured tie for the one of sober black, a blue frock-coat of exquisite make, and over this a

dark summer topcoat. When he surveyed himself in the glass he looked ten years younger than when he came in after the arduous labours of the day.

Of the money he had collected that day most was in notes or gold. He dropped all the notes and gold into his pocket, and, having locked a few cheques in his portmanteau, left the house quietly, as though not wishing to attract attention.

When he reached Welford Road he looked up and down for a minute, and muttering, "Pooh! No hope of a hansom in this place, of course!" turned his face west, and began walking rapidly with his quick step. Now and then he twiched his shoulders with suppressed energy; constantly he swung his eyes from left to right, as though it would not suit him to miss seeing anything on either side.

After a quarter-of-an-hour's walking he

came to the beginning of a tram line. He got into a car about to move. He took no notice of the destination of the car. The car was going west—that was enough for him.

In half-an-hour he reached a busy crossing where hansoms were plentiful. He alighted here, hailed a cab, and was driven to a quiet street off Piccadilly. He got down here, and proceeded on foot to a still quieter cross street, finally entering a modest, unpretentious house, the home of the Counter Club, a club which had nothing whatever to do with the yard-stick or scales and weights, but where members might amuse themselves at games in which no money changed hands at the table, and was therefore blameless. All a member had to do before beginning to play was to provide himself with counters, to be obtained of the secretary for—a consideration. The reason why these counters were used, and not

money, was because the games played here were games of chance, and it is illegal to play games of chance for money. Very elaborate precautions were taken by the committee to avoid any confusion between the counters whose use, after the formality of paying, was sanctioned by the secretary, and counters not issued by him.

It was, as Crawford had predicted, long after sunrise when he opened Layard's door with his latchkey. A good deal of the briskness and energy of his manner a few hours ago was abated. When he found himself in his sitting-room he flung his overcoat and hat on the table. "Cleaned out, by Heavens!" he cried. "Is this accursed luck to last for ever?"

Then he changed his clothes, putting on those he had worn the day before, and took a chair at the open window of his sitting-room, overlooking the canal.

Here he remained motionless, brooding gloomily until six o'clock. Then he got up, wrote a line to Layard saying he had to go away early, and would be back again on June 27. He left the house noiselessly, and made his way partly on foot, partly by tramcar (for here the tramcars run early), and partly by cab to Ludgate Hill, whence by train he reached Richmond.

It was still early, about eight o'clock, when Crawford gained his own home and let himself in. The servants were stirring. "Tell Mrs. Crawford when she rings," said he to the housemaid, "that I have been up all night, and have gone to lie down. Do not call me for breakfast." Then he went to his dressing-room, kicked off his boots with a curse, threw himself on the bed, and was asleep in five minutes.

Noon came and went, and still he slept peacefully. Just as one o'clock struck he

awoke with a start, and sprang from the bed, threw off his coat and waistcoat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, washed his face and hands, brushed his hair, and, when his coat and waistcoat were once more on, opened the door leading to his wife's room and went in.

Mrs. Crawford was sitting in an armchair by the open window. She was a pale, fragile, beautiful woman of seven-and-forty. Her eyes were large, luminous, violet, and full of gentleness and love. Her lips were remarkably beautiful and red for an invalid of her years. Her smile was the softest and most engaging and endearing in all the world. Nothing could exceed the tender loveliness of her face, or the sweet cheerful resignation of her disposition. The mitigation of her symptoms following the shock at the fire had not been permanent, and, although on the day of her second marriage

she had been well enough to walk up the whole length of the church, she was now once more incapable of moving across the room without help.

Upon the entrance of Crawford she turned her head quickly and smiled, holding out her hands, saying :

"O, William, I am glad you're back! I am glad to see you once more. I have been lonely. This is the longest time we have been separated since our marriage."

He went to her and kissed her affectionately, first her lips and then her forehead, and then her hair, now thickly shot with grey, but abundant still. He drew a chair beside hers, and sat down, taking one of her thin transparent hands in both his, and stroking it as though it was made of the most fragile and precious material.

"And how has my Nellie been since?" he asked in a low caressing voice, very

different from the one Red Jim or Alfred Layard had heard, but somewhat akin to the one in which he had apologised to Hetty the evening before.

"Well—very well; but lonely. I hoped you would be able to get home, dear, last night," she said, lying back in her chair and looking at him cut of her gentle violet eyes with an expression of absolute rest and joy.

"So did I. So, indeed, I should, only for my ill luck. I am greatly put out by my first visit to Welford, Nellie," he said, lowering his brows and looking troubled.

"Put out, dear! Put out by your visit to Welford! What put you out, William? I am very sorry you went. I am very sorry I let you go. I am sorry we ever got rid of Blore, if the thing is going to be a bother to you." Blore had been the agent before the advent of William Crawford.

"O, no! You need not be sorry. I was not put out on account of myself, but on account of you." He said this very tenderly, and with a gentle pressure on the transparent wax-like fingers between his hands.

"On my account, William?" she said, with a smile rich in love and satisfaction. "Why on my account, dear?"

"Well, because I have been disappointed in the results of my own efforts. I could get very little money. Out of over two hundred pounds overdue, upwards of a hundred of which is arrears, I got no more than twenty pounds." He said this ruefully, keeping his gaze fixed out of the window, as though ashamed to meet her eyes.

His wife laughed.

"Is that all? I thought you had met some unpleasantness to yourself there. My

dear William, don't let that trouble you. They will pay next month or the month after. They are excellent tenants, taking them all together."

"I daresay they *will* pay next month. But I could not help feeling disappointed and depressed in having to come back to you almost empty-handed. This is all I succeeded in getting—twenty-seven pounds ten."

He held out a little bundle to her.

With a laugh she pushed it away.

"It is yours, William, not mine. What have I to do with money now? You know more about money than I do. You take care of me and of the money for us. No, no; I will not touch it! Put it in the bank, or do what you like with it. I and all that was mine is yours, love."

There was a rapture of self-sacrifice and devotion in the woman's voice and manner.

There was a prodigal richness of love and faith in her eyes. She had not loved her first husband when she married him, and during the years they had spent together no passionate love had arisen in her heart, though she was fond of her husband and an excellent wife. She had passed not only the morning, but the zenith of life when she met this man; but to him she had given all that remained to her of love and hope and all her faith, never shaken by any shock.

Crawford winced slightly. Even he drew the line somewhere. He would rather battle stubbornly against odds for his way than sit still and be overwhelmed with free and lavish gifts. He liked to win, but he also liked to contend. He was passionately fond of money, and would sacrifice almost anything to get it. He would not work for it, but he would rather win it at cards than

get it for nothing. If he had not gambled away those eighty pounds last night, she would have given them to him now. He felt a perverse gratitude that he was not beholden to her for the eighty pounds. He had, as it were, earned those eighty pounds by the deceit he had practised. But this money, which she had refused to receive, burnt his fingers.

He took the money, however, and kissed her thin fragile hand, and pressed it against his broad powerful chest.

"You are the best woman in the world, Nellie, and the dearest. These fellows will, no doubt, pay next month. I wonder, if I asked Blore about them, would he give me some information?"

"I always found Mr. Blore the most courteous and honest and straightforward of men. If I were you I should see him."

"I will. And now let us drop business

and talk about something more interesting. Tell me to begin with, all that my good wife has been doing while I have been away." He slipped his arm round her waist and drew her head down upon his shoulder. His ways with men and women were widely different. With the former he was quick, or abrupt, or peremptory, or combative. He seemed to value his time at a price so high that the speech of other men caused him an intolerable loss, by reason of his having to listen to it.

With women he was soft and gentle, and even quietly humorous at times. He never was restless or impatient. His manner was that of one who had found out the condition of existence in which life could be most delightfully passed, that of his companion's society; and if he did not absolutely make love to a woman when alone with her, and this was but seldom with one under

fifty, he invariably implied that he would rather have her society than the society of all the men on this earth. He varied the details of his style according to the age, condition, and disposition of his companion.

He could adopt the melancholic, the enthusiastic, the poetic manner, according as circumstances and the subject demanded. Without any striking physical advantages, he was a most fascinating man to women. There was no false polish, no lacquer about him. He had no airs and graces. He did not groan or simper. He never laid aside his manhood for a moment. He did not beg so much as expostulate for love. His love-making took the form of an irresistible argument. He thought no more about women than he did about hares or rabbits, or flowers. He liked most women when they were not a trouble to him. They amused him. He liked their graceful ways

and their simple loyal hearts. He liked their dainty raiment and their soft delicate hands. He liked the perfumes they used and the flowers they wore. He liked most women, but he had a contempt for all of them.

He hated all men.

He did not repudiate or despise principles, but he had none himself. He nourished no theories as to what a man ought or ought not to do. He troubled himself about no other men at all. He always did exactly what he liked best, or believed to be best for his own interest. He had banished everything like religion from his mind long ago. He did not bother himself to ask whether there might or might not be a Hereafter. He was quite certain there was a Here, and he had made up his mind to make the best of it. In some senses of the word, he was no coward. He would

face a danger, even a risk, so long as he could see his way, and all was in the full light of day and commonplace. But he was afraid of the unseen: of the dagger or the bullet, of ghosts and supernatural manifestations. He was a gambler, and, like all gamblers, superstitious.

Twenty years ago he had been placed in the counting-house of a first-class Liverpool place of business. His mother was then dead, his father living. John Ainsworth—that was the name with which he started in life—was an only child. His father had saved a few thousand pounds as manager of a line of steamboats.

Young Ainsworth went to the bad before he was twenty-five, and was kicked out of his situation. The shock killed his father, who was an old man. There was no will, and young Ainsworth got his father's money and went betting on the turf, and when

there were no races he devoted his energies to cards. It was on his way back from a great Sussex race-meeting that he came upon the quiet little town of Beechley, and first met Kate Ray. He was then past thirty years of age, and had been moderately successful on the turf and on the board of green cloth. In Beechley he concealed the nature of his occupation, stayed there a month or two, and won the giddy heart of the beautiful Kate Ray. But her brother would not listen to him, and Kate, who would have a little money when she came of age, was a minor and in the hands of guardians, who would have nothing to do with him either. So Ainsworth, being by no means insensible to the money Kate would come into at twenty-one, drew off for a while, promising Kate to come back later.

Two whole years passed before John

Ainsworth again appeared at Beechley. By this time the flighty and beautiful girl had married Frank Mellor, who had just inherited a considerable fortune upon the death of an old miserly bachelor grand-uncle, that had lived all his life in London, and made money in the Baltic trade.

Then, out of a spirit of pure revenge, Ainsworth secretly pursued Kate, and worked upon her fickle and weak nature until she fled with him, taking her baby boy, Frank Mellor's child.

After three years that child had been restored to his father, while the mother lay dying at good Mrs. Pemberton's, a rifle-shot from Boland's Ait and the office of John Ainsworth, who had assumed the name of Crawford.

CHATPER X.

FATHER AND SON.

Of all the men in London, there was scarcely one less qualified to take charge of a young child than Francis Bramwell, living alone on his tiny island in the South London Canal. He was not used to children. He had had only one sister, and no brother. His sister, twelve years older than himself, had married and gone away to Australia before he was eight years of age. His father had been a successful attorney in Shoreham, where he died ten years ago, when his son was just twenty years old. His mother had been dead many years at that time.

When his grand-uncle was buried a few

years later, Bramwell became rich and left Shoreham. He had been reading for the Bar in a half-hearted and dilatory way.

He gave up all thought of the profession, and resolved to lead a life of lettered ease and contemplation, to be summed up later, probably in a book of one kind or another. In fact, as soon as he found himself independent he determined to devote his attention to poetry, and, as he did not feel certain of possessing a strong vein of genius, he determined to confine himself to translations by way of a beginning.

For quietness he moved out of Shoreham to a cottage a few miles from the dull little town of Beechley, and in Beechley, after the first visit of John Ainsworth, he made the acquaintance of Philip Ray and his beautiful sister Kate.

When he fell in love he threw his books to the winds, and, beyond verses addressed

to his mistress, had no dealings with the Muse.

He was then a man to all outward appearance of singularly unemotional temperament. But under a placid demeanour he concealed a sensitive and enthusiastic nature, a nature of fire and spirit, subject to raptures and despairs, and desiring rapture almost as a necessity. Prose would not satisfy him; he must have the wine of poetry. To love was not enough for him; he must adore. Devotion was too tame; he must immolate himself.

He had lived most of his years since adolescence apart, and had never tried to make himself agreeable to any girl, until he told himself that life without Kate Ray would be simply intolerable. After marriage he treated his wife more like the goddess of a temple than the young, pretty, vain, foolish, flighty mistress of a home.

Kate, who loved flattery and fine clothes, and trivial gaiety, could not understand him. She thought him cold and formal at one time; a wild man, a lunatic at another. He did not stoop to flattery, or condescend to simulation. He was worshipful, not gallant. He praised her spirit and her soul, possessions to which she did not attach much importance. He said little about her eyes, or her figure, or her hair, which she knew to be beautiful, and of which she was inordinately vain.

She could not comprehend him. She did not try very hard. She never tried very hard to do anything, except dress well and look pretty. He was, no doubt, very grand, but she loved John Ainsworth all the while. John's ways and manner were perfectly intelligible to her, and when he came to her the second time secretly, and threw a romantic light upon their stolen

meetings—when she heard his flattery and sighs and oaths—her weak will gave way, and she fled with him, taking the boy with her.

Now, after three years, and when Bramwell had made up his mind he should never see wife or child again, the boy had come from his wife's death-bed to his door. What was he to do with this helpless being?

He had decreed in his own soul, beyond the reach of appeal, that he would never see his wife again. It was plain she had not contemplated a meeting with him. It was plain she had put such a thing beyond her hopes—beyond, most likely, her desires. For had she not known where he lay hidden? and had she not refrained from seeking him, refrained even from letting him know she was alive? But when she found herself on the point of dissolution, when she had been told she had only a few hours

to live, when the delirium of death was upon her, she had sent the child to him. She had at least the grace to feel her shame, and sufficient knowledge of him to be certain that no consideration on earth would induce him once more to look on her, the woman he had loved, who had betrayed his honour and laid his life in ruin.

But the boy? What was to be done with him?

The night before he had been too stupefied to think. When Philip left him he had taken the child to his own room and put him in his own bed, and the little fellow, overcome by fatigue and the lateness of the hour, had fallen asleep.

Now it was bright, clear, unclouded morning, the morning after the boy's advent. The little fellow still slept, but the father was broad awake. He had risen at five, and was sitting in the room

where Philip had found him the evening before. His elbows rested on the table; his head leaned upon his hands.

What should he do with the boy? Her child?—the child of the woman who had brought infamy on his name, who had taken the heart out of his life, leaving nothing but a harsh and battered husk behind?

The child was like her, too. He had known the first moment he looked on the little face that this was the baby she had stolen away from his home when he thought she was gradually growing to love him, when he thought she had forgotten for ever the villain who had induced her perfidy!

Like her! Good Heavens! was this child to live with him always? Was this child, day after day, hour after hour, to remind him by the look in his eyes of all his youthful dreams of love and happiness, and the wildering blow that for a time drove his

reason from him and wrecked his life before the voyage was well begun?

That would be intolerable. No man could bear that. Heaven could not expect him to endure such a hell on earth.

He rose with a groan, and began pacing the room up and down.

He was a man slightly below the middle height, somewhat uncouth and awkward in his motions. His shoulders were broad, his figure thin almost to emaciation. He had large and powerful hands, not handsome and soft, but muscular and knotty, like those of a man who had done much physical labour, although he had never performed a day's manual work in all his life. His nose was long and blunt at the end. His cheeks were sunken. There were odd grey streaks in his long, straight hair. He stooped slightly, and was slovenly in his carriage and dress. The colour of his face

was dark, almost dusky. His forehead was high and pale.

The mere shell of the man was poor, almost mean. He did not look as though he could fight or work. Beyond the breadth of his shoulders there was no suggestion of bodily strength about him. When he walked his tread lacked firmness. He looked as though the push of a child would knock him down.

But when you had formed a poor opinion of the man, and set him down as a weed, and were prepared to make short work of him morally, or mentally, or physically, and came close to him face to face, and he looked up at you and spoke, you felt confused, abashed. His eyes were dark hazel, large, deep-set, luminous. They seldom moved quickly, they seldom flashed, they seldom laughed. They rarely seemed concerned with the people or things imme-

diately in front of him. They had the awful sadness and far-away look of the Sphinx. They saw not you, nor through you, but beyond you. You became not the object of their gaze, but an interruption in their range. They made you feel that you were in the way. You seemed to be an impertinence interposing between a great spirit in its commune with supernatural and august mysteries.

His voice was slow, deliberate, low in ordinary speech. It was not musical. It had a breathlessness about it which fixed the attention at once of those who heard. It suggested that the words spoken were read from the margin of some mighty page, and that the speaker, if he chose, could decipher the subject of the scroll.

If he raised his voice above this pitch it became uncertain, harsh, grating, discordant. It suggested the unwilling awakening

of the man. It seemed to say that he lived at peace, and would that he were left at peace, and that you came unnecessarily, undesired, to rouse and harass him.

But it was when excited beyond this second stage, it was when not only awakened but lifted into the expression of enthusiasm, that the wonderful qualities of his voice were displayed. Then it became full and rich and flexible and organ-toned, at once delicate and powerful. It sounded as though not only the words, but the music also, were written on the great scroll before his eyes, and he was reading both with authority.

It was the spirit in the eyes and the spirit in the voice Philip Ray worshipped. He knew the heart of this man was made of gold, but in the eyes and the voice he found the spirit of a seer, a hero, a prophet.

The spirit of this man Kate Ray never knew, never even perceived. She was too busy with the thought of her own physical beauty to notice anything in the man but his plain appearance and unusual ways. He had more money than ever she had hoped to share with a husband, but he cared nothing for the things she liked or coveted. He would not take a house in London: he would not move into even Beechley. The only value he set upon a competency was because of the power it gave him over books, and because of the privilege it afforded him of living far away from the hurly-burly of men. His union with Kate Ray was an ill-assorted marriage, and the greatest evil that can arise out of an ill-assorted marriage had come of it.

From the day Kate left his house he never opened a volume of verse. At first

he plunged into a vortex of excitement, from which he did not emerge until he had lost in gambling everything but Boland's Ait, which brought in no revenue, and an income of about a hundred a year from some property in the neighbourhood of the island.

When he regained his senses, and resolved upon retiring into solitude, he recognised the importance, the necessity of finding some occupation for his mind. He would have nothing which could remind him of the past, nothing which could recall to his mind the peaceful days at Shoreham or the joy and hope that his sweetheart and wife had brought into his life. All that was to be forgotten for ever. His life was over. It was immoral to anticipate the stroke of death. Between him and death there lay nothing to desire but oblivion, and work was the best thing

in which to drown thought. He would devote the remainder of his life to history, philosophy, science.

Although he had been on the island now more than two years, he had still no definite idea of turning his studies to practical account. He read and read and made elaborate notes and extracts from books. But his designs were vague and nebulous. He called it all work. It kept his mind off the past: that was the only result of all his labours. He had no object to work for. He shuddered at the bare idea of notoriety or fame, and he did not need money, for his means were sufficient for his simple wants. Work was with him merely a draught of Lethe. He numbed his brain with reading, and when he could read no longer he copied out passages from his books or forced himself to think on subjects which would not have been bearable three years

ago. He was not no much conquering himself as dulling his power to feel.

Now, in upon this life had come the boy, bringing with him more potent voices from the past than all the verses of all the poets; and, worst of all, bringing with him the face of his disgraced, dead wife!

What should he do? Either madness or death would be a relief, but neither would come. The two things of which men are most afraid are madness and death, and here was he willing to welcome either with all the joy of which his broken heart was still capable.

When that baby was born he had felt no affection for it on its own account. It seemed inexpressibly dear to her, and therefore it was after her the most precious being in all the world to him. Up to that time he knew his wife's heart had not gone out to him in love as his heart had gone out to

her. He believed that the child would be the means of winning his beautiful wife's love for him. He had read in books innumerable that wives who had been indifferent towards their husbands in the early days of marriage grew affectionate when children came. For this reason he welcomed with delight the little stranger. This baby would be a more powerful bond between them than the promises made by her at the altar. It would not only reconcile her to the life-long relations upon which they had entered, but endear him to her.

But she broke her vow, broke the bond between them, and in fleeing from his house took with her the child, the creature that was dearer to her than he! Here was food for hopelessness more bitter than despair.

Now, when hope was buried for ever, and she was dead, the child had come back to remind him every hour of the past, to neu-

tralise the cups of Lethe he felt bound to drink, that his life might not be a life of never-ending misery, to torture him with his wife's eyes, which had closed on him for ever three years ago, and which now were closed for ever on all things in death.

What should he do? Would not merciful Providence take his reason away, or stop these useless pulses in his veins?

He threw himself once more in his chair, and covered his face with his hands.

From abroad stole sounds of the awakening world. The heavy lumbering and grating of wagons and carts came from Welford Road, and from the tow-path the dull heavy thuds of clumsy horses' feet.

The man sat an hour in thought, in reverie.

At length Bramwell took down his hands and raised his large eyes, in which there now blazed the fire of intense excitement.

"Light!" he cried aloud; "God grant me light!"

He kept his eyes raised. His lips moved, but no words issued from them. An expression of ecstasy was on his face. His cry had not been a cry for light, but a note of gratitude-giving that light had been vouchsafed to him. He was returning thanks.

At length his lips ceased to move, the look of spiritual exaltation left his face, his eyes were gradually lowered, and he rose slowly from his seat.

He stood a minute with his hand on his forehead, and said slowly, "I was thinking of myself only. I have been thinking of myself only all my life. I have, thank God, something else, some one else to think of now! Who am I, or what am I, that I should have expected happiness, complete happiness, bliss? Who am I, or what am I, that I should repine because I suffer?

Who am I, or what am I, that I should murmur? My eyes are open at last. My eyes are open, and my heart too. Let me go and look."

He crept noiselessly out of the room to the one in which the boy lay still sleeping.

The chamber was full of the broad full even light of morning in early summer. The window stood open, the noise of the carts and wagons came from Welford Road, and the dull heavy thuds of the clumsy horses' hoofs from the tow-path. The sparrows were twittering and flickering about the cottage on the island. Dull and grimy as the place usually appeared, there was now an air of health and brightness and vigorous life about it which filled and expanded the heart of the recluse.

For years he had felt that he was dead, that his fellowship with man had ceased for ever. His heart was now opened once more.

Who should cast the first stone, the first stone into an open grave, her grave, Kate's grave? His Kate's grave! Not he; O, not he! His young, his beautiful, his darling Kate's grave! His young Kate's grave!

He turned to the bed on which rested the child.

Yes, there lay young Kate, younger than ever he had known her. The beautiful boy! There was her raven hair, there the sweet strange curve of the mouth, there the little hand under the cheek, as Kate used to lie when she slept.

"God give me life and reason for him who is so like what I have lost!" he cried; and circling his arm round the little head, he kissed the sweet strange curve about the little mouth, and burst into tears, the first he had shed for a dozen long years. In his great agony three years ago he had not wept.

The child awoke, smiled, stretched up his little arms, and caught his father round the neck.

"I want to go mother," whimpered the boy when he saw whom he held.

"You cannot go just now, child. But you and I shall go to her one day—in Heaven."

CHAPTER XI.

"CAN I PLAY WITH THAT LITTLE BOY?"

HETTY LAYARD was not sorry when, upon the morning of Mr. William Crawford's return from the Counters Club, she found a note for her brother Alfred, explaining that he had gone out for an early walk, the weather was so lovely, and that he would not be back until next month, when he hoped to find her and Mr. Layard very well; and thanking her and him for the entertainment afforded him. He, moreover, left her a cheque—one collected the previous day—for a couple of sovereigns, out of which he begged her to take whatever his food had cost and half-a-crown which she was to present from him to Mrs. Grainger.

Miss Layard uttered a little sigh of relief when she put down the note. Every one knows that men are a nuisance about a house, especially men who have no fixed or regular business hours of absence. Men are very well in their own way, which means to the housewife when they are not in her way. A man who is six, eight, or ten hours away from home every day, and goes to church twice on Sunday and takes a good long walk between the two services, may not only be tolerated, but enjoyed. But a man who does not get up until ten o'clock and keeps crawling or dashing about the house all day long is an unmitigated and crushing evil. It does not matter whether he wears heavy boots or affects the costume of a sybaritic sloven, and wanders about like a florid and venerable midday ghost in dressing-gown and slippers.

A woman's house is not her own as long as there is a man it. While enduring the presence of male impertinence she cannot do exactly as she likes. There is at least one room she may not turn topsy-turvy, if the fit takes her. There is no freedom, no liberty. If the man remain quietly in one room, there is the unpleasant feeling that he must be either dead or hungry. A man has very little business to be in the house during day-time unless he is either dead or hungry. If the man does not confine himself to one room he is quite certain to go stumbling over sweeping-brushes and dust-pans in passages where he has no more right to be than a woman behind the counter of a bank or on the magisterial bench. From, say, ten o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon you really can't have too little of a man about a house. Very prac tical housekeepers prefer not to see their

male folk between nine and seven. Undoubtedly, strong-minded women believe that two meals a day and the right to sleep under his own roof of nights is as much as may with advantage to comfort be allowed to man.

But Hetty Layard was not strong-minded at all. She was not over tender-hearted either, though she was as tender-hearted as becomes a young girl of healthy body and mind, one not sicklied over with the pale cast of sentimentalism. She was as bright and cheerful as spring; but all the same, she was not sorry when she found her lodger had fled, and that they were to have the place to themselves for a month.

That day Hetty was to enjoy the invaluable service of Mrs. Grainger from breakfast to tea-time. From that day until Mr. Crawford's next visit Mrs. Grainger was to come only for a couple of hours in the

forenoon every day to do the rough work. Mrs. Grainger was childless, and could be spared from her own hearth between breakfast and supper, as her husband took his dinner with him to the works, and had supper and tea together.

"So the unfortunate man has succeeded in getting out of your clutches," said Alfred Layard at his late breakfast, when Hetty told him the news.

"Yes; but he left something behind him. Look." She handed her brother the cheque. "I am to take the price of all he has had out of this, and give half-a-crown to Mrs. Grainger."

Alfred Layard shook his head very gravely. "Hetty, I had, I confess to you, some doubts of this man's sanity; I have no longer any doubt. The man is mad!"

"Considering that we are obliged to find

attendance, I think he has been very generous to Mrs. Grainger."

"As mad as a hatter," said the brother sadly.

"If, Alfred, I tell you how much to take out of this, will you send him the change, or is the change to remain over until next time?"

"The miserable man is as mad as a March hare."

"See! This is all I spent for him—twelve and threepence, and that includes a lot of things that will keep till he comes again."

"To think of this poor man trusting a harpy, a lodging-house keeper, with untold gold! O, the pity of it!"

"There are candles and lamp-oil, and tea and soap, and sugar, and other things that will keep, Alfred. You can explain this when you are sending him the change. I suppose it will be best to send him the

change. You have his Richmond address?"

"Freddie," said the father, addressing his flaxen-haired, blue-eyed little son at the other side of the table, "when you grow up and are a great big man, don't lodge with your Aunt Hetty. She'd fleece you, my boy. She'd starve you, and she wouldn't leave you a rag to cover you." He shook a warning finger at the boy.

"I shall live always with Aunt Hetty," said the boy stoutly, "and I want more bread-and-butter, please."

"See my poor child, she is already practising. If she only had her way, she would reduce you to a skeleton in a week."

"Alfred, I wish you'd be sensible for a minute. This is business. I really don't know what to do, and you ought to tell me. Will you look at this list, and see if it is

properly made out?" she said pouting. She had a pretty way of affecting to pout and then laughing at the idea of her being in a bad humour.

Her brother took the slip of paper and glanced at it very gravely.

"May I ask," said he, putting down the slip on the breakfast cloth, "whether this man has had his boots polished here?"

"Of course he had; twice—three times I think."

"And had he free and unimpeded use of condiments, such as salt, pepper, vinegar, mustard?"

"Yes. You don't think he could eat without salt, do you?"

"Perhaps — perhaps he even had PICKLES?"

"I think he had some pickles."

"Then, Hetty"—he rose, and, buttoning up his coat, made signs of leaving—"I am

going to find an auctioneer to sell up the furniture. We are ruined."

"Ah, Alfred, like a good fellow, help me!" she pleaded, coming to him and putting her hand on his arm. "What do you mean by asking all those silly questions about blacking and vinegar?"

"Not one, Hetty, not one of the items I have named is charged in the bill, and I am a pauper, pauperised by your gross carelessness, by the shamefully lax way in which you have kept my books. What do you think would become of the great corporation I serve if our accounts were kept in so criminally neglectful a manner? Why, the Welford Gas Company would be in liquidation in a month! Suppose we treated ammonia lightly; suppose we gave all our coke to the Mission to the Blacks for distribution among the negroes; suppose we made a present of our tar to the Royal Academicians

to make aniline colours for pictures to be seen only by night; suppose we gave all our gas to aëronauts who wanted to stare the unfortunate man in the moon out of countenance; suppose we supplied all our customers with *dry meters*, Hetty; suppose, I say, we supplied all our customers with *dry meters*, where should we be? Where on earth should we be?"

"Perhaps not on earth at all, Alfred, but gone up to heaven with the aëronauts. Do be sensible for a moment. I want you to tell me if we are to keep the change until next time or send it after him?"

"Have you given that half-a-crown to Mrs. Grainger?"

"Yes."

"O, you prodigal simpleton! What need was there to give it? Why did you not keep it and buy a furbelow? No doubt you were afraid that when this man came back he

would find out all about it. Nonsense! Why, we could dismiss Mrs. Grainger, and if she came loafing about the place, nothing in the world could be easier than to push her into the canal. I like her husband, and it would please me to do him a good turn."

There was a knock at the door, and the charwoman put in her head.

"Come in, Mrs. Grainger. What is it?" said Hetty, going towards the door.

Mrs. Grainger, in her lilac cotton dress and large apron, advanced a step into the room. Her sleeves were rolled up above the elbows of her red thick arms. She was a stout, fair-faced woman of fifty. She had not a single good feature in her face. But her expression was wholly honest and not unkindly.

Layard could not help looking from her to Hetty and contrasting the joyous youth

and grace, the fresh colour and golden-brown hair of the girl, and the dull, dead, unintelligent drab appearance of the woman.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Layard," said the charwoman, "but you were talking to me yesterday and the day before about the poor lonely gentleman that lives on Boland's Ait."

"Yes. Well, what about him? Have you found out anything fresh?" said Hetty with interest.

"Only that he isn't alone any longer."

"You don't mean to say he has got married and has just brought his wife home," said Layard, affecting intense astonishment and incredulity.

"No, sir," said the woman, somewhat abashed by his manner. "Not a wife, sir, but a child; a little boy about the size of Master Freddie there."

"Bless my soul, wonders will never cease!

But I say, Hetty, I must be off. If the Cham of Tartary and the great sea-serpent came to live on that island, and had asked me to swim across and have tiffin and blubber with them, I couldn't go now. I must be off to the works. Hetty, we'll resume the consideration of the cruet-stand when I come back this evening. Let all those matters stand till then. The delay will give us an opportunity of charging interest for the money in hand."

He hastened from the room, and in a minute was out of the house and hastening up Crawford Street, with the long streamers of his beard blowing over his shoulders.

"Where did you see the child from, Mrs. Grainger?" asked Hetty, when her brother disappeared up the street. "From Mr. Crawford's room?"

"No, miss; you can't see into the timber-yard on the island from Mr. Crawford's

room on account of the wall. But you can see over the wall from your own room, miss; and 'twas from your own room I saw the child. And he was carrying on, too, with that child, miss," said the woman, coming further into the room, and busying herself about clearing away the breakfast-things.

She was not exactly idle or lazy; but no living woman would rather scrub and scour than chat, particularly when paid by time and not by piece.

"What do you mean by 'carrying on?' What was he doing?"

"Well, he was kissing, and cuddling, and hugging the child, more like a mother with her baby than a man with a child. The boy is quite as big as little Master Freddie there, and the poor gentleman seemed to be pretending the great boy couldn't walk without help, for he led him by the hand

up and down the yard, and when he did let go of him for a moment he kept his hand over the little chap's head, like to be ready to catch hold of him if he was falling or stumbled. A great big boy, as big as Master Freddie there; it's plain to be seen he's not used to children," said Mrs. Grainger scornfully; for, although she had no children of her own, she was sympathetic and cordial with little ones, and often looked after a neighbour's roomful of babies while the mother went out marketing or took the washing, or mangling, or sewing home.

"Perhaps it is his own child," said Hetty, as she helped to put the breakfast-things on the tray.

"His own child? Of course it isn't. How could it be? Why, if it was his own child he'd be used to it. He'd know better than to go on with such foolery as guiding it with his hand along a level yard. He

doesn't know anything about children, no more than the ground they are walking on."

"Perhaps he is afraid it might fall into the water. I'll wash up the breakfast-things myself, Mrs. Grainger."

"Very well, miss. Afraid it might fall into the water! Why, the child couldn't. They're in the timber-yard, and there's a wall all around it, and neither of the gates is open."

"Well," said Hetty, as the woman left the room carrying the tray, "maybe he is looking after the child for some friend; perhaps the child has only come on a visit to him."

"Look after a child for a friend! Is he the sort of man to look after a child for a friend?" Mrs. Grainger called out from the kitchen. "What friend would ask a man like him to mind a child? I'd as soon ask a railway-engine or a mangle to look

after a child of mine, if I had one. Besides, if the child belongs to a friend, what does he mean by kissing and cuddling it?"

"I give it up," said the girl. "I own I can make nothing of it. What do you think, Mrs. Grainger? You know more about this strange man and his strange ways than I do."

"I think," said Mrs. Grainger, in the voice of one uttering an authoritative decision, "the whole thing is a mystery, and I can make nothing of it. But you, miss, go up and look. If you want to see him, he is in the timber-yard. Go to your room, miss, and have a peep. You may be able to make something of it; I can't."

"I will," said the girl; "I shall be down in a few minutes." And she ran out of the sitting-room, upstairs with a light springy step, and the murmured burden of a song on her lips.

She went to the open window of her own room and looked out.

It was close on noon, and the blazing light of early summer filled all the place beneath her. The view had no charms of its own, but the fact that she was above the ground and away from immediate contact with the sordid earth had a purifying effect upon the scene. Then, again, what place is it that can look wholly evil when shone upon by the unclouded sun of fresh May?

In front and to right and left the canal flamed in the sunlight. At the other side of the water lay a sloping bank of lush green grass, beyond that a road, and at the other side of the road a large yard, in which a great number of gipsy-vans, and vans belonging to cheap-Jacks and to men who remove furniture, were packed.

So far, if there was nothing to delight,

there was nothing to displease the spectator. In fact, from a scenic point of view the colour was very good, for you had the flaming canal, the dark green of the grassy bank, and the red and yellow and blue caravans of the gipsies and the cheap-Jacks and the people who remove furniture.

Beyond this yard there spread a vast extent of small, mean, ill-kept houses which were not picturesque, and which suggested painful thoughts concerning the squalor and poverty of the people who lived in them.

To the right stretched the tow-path leading to Camberwell, to the left a row of stores, and only a hundred yards off was the empty ice-house. To the right lay Leeham, invisible from where the girl stood, and nearer and visible a row of stores and a stone-yard.

In front of her was Boland's Ait, and in the old timber-yard of the islet Francis

Bramwell walking up and down, holding the hand of a boy of between three and four in his hands, as though the child had walked for the first time within this month of May.

Mrs. Grainger was right. This man, whose face Hetty could not see, for he bent low over the child, was treating the boy as though he were no more than a year or fifteen months old. He was also displaying towards him a degree of affection altogether inconsistent with the supposition that the youngster was merely the son of a friend.

The two were walking up and down the yard, the right hand of the child in the left hand of the man, the right hand of the man at one time resting lightly on the boy's head, at another on the boy's shoulder. The man's whole mind seemed centred on his charge. He never once raised his head

to look around. No doubt the thought that he might be observed never occurred to him. For two years he had lived on that island, and never until now arose a chance of any one seeing him when he was in the yard; for the only windows that overlooked it were those of Crawford's House, and that had been unoccupied until three days ago.

Suddenly it occurred to Hetty that she was intruding upon this stranger's privacy. Of course she was free to look out of her own window as long as she liked; but then it was obvious Bramwell thought there was no spectator, or, at all events, he had not bargained in his mind for a spectator.

A faint flush came into her cheek, and she was on the point of drawing back when a loud shrill voice sounded at her side:

"Aunt Hetty, Aunt Hetty, I want to see the little boy!"

The girl started, and then stood motionless, for the recluse below had suddenly looked up, and was gazing in amazement at the girl and child in the window above him.

The man and boy in the yard were both bare-headed. Bramwell raised his open hand above his eyes to shield them from the glare of the sky, that he might see the better.

Hetty drew back a pace, as though she had been discovered in a shameful act. Her colour deepened, but she would not go altogether away from the window. That would be to admit she had been doing something wrong.

"Aunt Hetty," cried Freddie, in the same shrill loud voice, "can I play with that little boy down there? I have no one to play with here."

The upturned face of the man smiled, and the voice of the man said, "Come down,

my little fellow, and play with this boy. He is just like yourself—he has no one to play with. You will let him come, please? I will take the utmost care of him."

"I—I'll see," stammered Hetty, quite taken aback.

"You will let him come? O, pray do. My little fellow has no companion but me," said the deep, full, rich pleading voice of the man.

In her confusion Hetty said, "If it's safe. If he can get across."

"O, it's quite safe. I will answer for the child. I'll push across the stage in a moment, and fetch the child. There is plenty of room for them to play here, and absolutely no danger."

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP RAY AT RICHMOND.

Once Philip Ray started on any course he was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. All his time was not at his disposal. He was in the Custom House, and for several hours a day he was chained to his desk.

No sooner were his duties discharged on the day following the arrival of the boy at Boland's Ait than he hastened to Ludgate Hill railway station and took the first train to Richmond.

He had not worked out any definite plan of search. His mind was not a particularly orderly one. Indeed, he was largely a creature of impulse, and in setting out he

had only two ideas in his head. First, to find the man who had caused all the shame and misery; and, second, to execute summary vengeance on that man the moment he encountered him.

He did not seek to justify himself morally in this course; he did not consider the moral aspect of his position at all. When his blood was up he was impulsive, headlong. He had made up his mind three years ago that John Ainsworth deserved death at his hands for the injury done, and neither during any hour of these three years nor now had he the slightest hesitancy or compunction.

He had sworn an oath that he would kill this man if ever he could get at him, and kill him he would now in spite of consequences. People might call it a cowardly murder if they pleased. What did he care? This man deserved death, and if they chose to hang him afterwards, what of that? He

was quite prepared to face that fate. Kate was dying or dead; the honourable name of Ray had been disgraced for ever; the life of the man he loved best in all the world had been blasted by a base, vicious scoundrel, and he would shoot that scoundrel just as he would shoot a mad dog or a venomous snake. He was inexorable.

No thought of seeking his sister entered his mind. She was, doubtless, dead by this time. From the moment she left her husband's roof she had been dead to him. In the presence of Frank, and with that letter before him, he had held his tongue regarding her. But his mind was completely unchanged. The best thing that could happen to her was that she should die. A woman who could do what she had done deserved no thought of pity, had no place in the consideration of sane people; a woman who could leave Frank Mellor, now

known as Francis Bramwell, for John Ainsworth, deserved no pity, no human sympathy. She had sinned in the most heinous way against loyalty; let him show that all the blood of the family was not base and traitorous. He would sin on the other side to make matters even.

He knew that such forms of vengeance were not usual in this time and country. So much the worse for this time and country. What other kind of satisfaction was possible? The law courts? Monstrous! How could the law courts put such a case right? By divorcing those who had already been divorced! By a money penalty exacted from the culprit! Pooh, pooh! If a man shot a man they hanged him, put him out of pain at once. But if a man was the cause of a woman's lingering death from shame and despair, and imposed a life of living-death on an

innocent human being, they let the miscreant go scot-free; unless, indeed, they imposed a fine such as they would inflict for breach of an ordinary commercial contract. The idea that treatment of this sort had even the semblance of justice could not be entertained by a child or an idiot!

Before setting out from Ludgate Hill and on the way down to Richmond nothing seemed more reasonable than that he should take the train to that town, and without any serious difficulty find John Ainsworth. The town was not large, and he could give any one of whom he asked aid the man's name and a full description of his appearance. He possessed, moreover, the additional fact that Ainsworth had shaved his face, taken off his beard, whiskers, and moustache. He should be on his track in an hour, and face to face

with Ainsworth in a couple of hours at the outside.

He stepped briskly out of the train at Richmond, and waited until the platform was cleared of those who had alighted. Then he spoke to the most intelligent porter he could find. First of all he gave the man a shilling. He said he was in search of a Mr. John Ainsworth, a gentleman of about thirty-five or thirty-seven years of age, five feet eight or thereabouts, with a quick restless manner, a clean-shaven roundish face, dark hair and dark eyes, in figure well made, but inclining to stoutness.

The porter knew no gentleman of the name, he was sorry to say, and recalled a great number of gentlemen who corresponded in some respects with the description, but none that corresponded with all. As far as he was aware, there was no man of the name in Richmond—that

is, no gentleman of the name. He knew a Charles Ainsworth, a cabdriver, but Charles Ainsworth was five feet eleven or six feet, and no more than twenty-five years of age. Perhaps the stationmaster might be able to help.

The stationmaster knew no one of the name—that is, no one named John Ainsworth. He knew Charles Ainsworth the cabdriver. He could not identify any one corresponding to Ray's description, but the interrogator must remember that a great number of gentlemen passed through that station from week's end to week's end. Why not look in a directory and find out his friend's address at once?

Of course. That was an obvious course. It had not occurred to Ray before.

Accordingly he left the station, and turned into an hotel and asked to see the local directory.

No John Ainsworth here.

Another disappointment. But this was not disheartening; for Ainsworth in all likelihood was not a householder. At the hotel they suggested that the post-office would be the place to learn the address of his friend.

Ray smiled grimly as he noticed that the three people of whom he had inquired all referred to Ainsworth as his "friend."

His luck at the post-office was bad also. Nothing was known there of any Ainsworth but Charles, the cabdriver.

This was becoming exasperating. The man he sought could not have vanished into thin air. Edward Lambton, who saw Ainsworth, was quite sure of his identity. When a man recognises another who has taken off his beard, whiskers and moustache, there is not the slightest room for doubt of the identification, particularly if

the identification is casual, not suggested, spontaneous.

Ray felt more than exasperated now. He was furious. He walked about the town for an hour, asking here and there, but could find no trace of John Ainsworth. He was no more known in the place than if he had never been born.

Suddenly he stopped with an exclamation of surprise and anger, "I am a lunatic!" he cried in a low voice, "I'm a born lunatic! Is it because Lambton saw Ainsworth on the platform of this place that he must live here? Might not ten thousand people have seen me on the platform of this place an hour or so ago, and do I live here? Indeed I do not think any human being out of Bedlam could be so hopelessly idiotic as I have been to feel sure he lived here."

He found his way back to the station

and returned to town. He got out at Camberwell, and walked from there to Boland's Ait. It was upon this occasion that Crawford, sallying from Layard's, learnt from Red Jim how the man who had come along the tow-path had failed to emerge from the cover of the island.

"And what have you been doing all day?" asked Ray, when he was seated in one of the armchairs in the study or dining-room of the cottage.

The boy was seated on the floor, turning over the leaves of a book full of pictures.

"We have been busy and playing," said Bramwell, nodding towards the child. "I was putting the place to rights, getting in order for my new lodger. I thought you would have come sooner." For the first time in three years Francis Bramwell spoke in a cheerful tone and looked almost happy. There had always been a great deal of re-

serve in this man, but now he seemed more open and free than he had ever appeared even before his marriage. Suffering had purified, and the presence of his son, whom he had taken into his heart, had soothed and humanised the recluse.

Ray paused in doubt as to whether he should tell the other of his visit to Richmond. He had taken no notice of the boy upon his entrance, but he was pleased and grateful that Bramwell showed an awakened interest in life. The child had done this, and his heart softened towards the little fellow. Anything that brought light to his brother-in-law was an object of thankfulness. If his friend, his brother, as he called him, were in better spirits, owing to the coming of the child, why should he dissipate them by telling him of his search of vengeance. He answered the question of the other by saying:

"I was delayed. I had to attend to something."

Bramwell's face darkened. Philip had no secret from him. He was a man who could keep nothing from a friend. Why did he not say what had detained him? There could be only one explanation: the delay had been caused by something in connection with the letter Philip had received the evening before. It was plain to Bramwell what had detained Kate's brother. Bramwell said very gravely:

"You have been to Richmond?"

Philip nodded.

"Ah," Bramwell sighed heavily, "I thought so! Did you find out anything?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He is not known there. I tried at the railway station, in the directory, at the post-office, in a dozen shops. No account or trace was to be found of the scoundrel."

"Thank Heaven!"

"I do not believe he lives there. He must have been only in the town a little while, visiting some one, or passing through, on some new devil's work, I will swear."

"It was a mercy for you that he was not to be found."

"A mercy for him, you mean."

For a few minutes Bramwell seemed plunged in gloomy thought. The two men were silent. At length the elder shook himself, rose, and said:

"Come, see the arrangements I have made for the boy. He is to sleep in my room. I am going to give him my bed. The stretcher will do excellently for me. I have spoken to Mrs. Treleaven—you know the woman who brings me what I want every morning. She is to come for an hour or two a day and keep matters right for us. Up to this she has never been on the Ait,

but I could not myself keep the place as tidy as I should like now that I am not alone. Early impressions are lasting, and I must do the best I can to brighten up this hermitage for the sake of the new young eyes. Come!"

The two men went to the bedroom.

"See," said the father, with a sad smile; "I have laid down this bit of old carpet, and hung up these prints, and put the stretcher close to the bed, so that I may be near him, and also that it may serve as a step when he is getting in and out of his own bed. Children, I have often read, should sleep in beds by themselves; and, above all, it is not wholesome for them to sleep with grown-up people. You don't think this place is unhealthy for a child, Philip?"

"O, no! You have enjoyed very good health here."

What a change—what a blessed change had come over this man! He had been re-born, re-created by the touch of those chubby fingers and young red lips; by the soft, silky hair and the large dark eyes; by the fresh, sweet clear voice, and the complete dependency and helplessness of the boy.

"But I am a man in the vigour of life," said the father anxiously; "and am therefore able to resist influences of climate or situation which might be perilous to one so young and delicately formed, eh? You don't think there is any danger in the place?"

"Certainly not."

"But so much water that is almost stagnant? You are aware that there is hardly any current in the canal, and that there are no locks on it?"

"O, yes; but I never heard any com-

plaints of insalubrity, and you know the neighbourhood of a gas-house, although it does not make the air bright or sweet, purifies it."

"I know; I thought of that. I know that a still more unsavoury business—that of candle-making—is a preventive to pestilence; at least, it was in the days of the Plague, and chandlers had immunities and privileges on that account. But it is the water I fear for him. None of your family, Philip, had delicate chests?"

"No, no; I think you may make your mind easy. I am sure the boy will thrive marvellously here."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. Let us go back. The poor little chap must not be allowed to feel lonely. You did not take any notice of him when you came in. Philip," he put his hand on his brother's arm, "you are not going to visit any anger

on the desolate orphan? Remember, he is an orphan now; and you must not bear ill-will towards the dead, or visit the—the faults of the parent on the child."

"Tut, tut!" said Philip, as they left the room and returned to the study; "I am not going to do anything of the kind. I took no notice of the child when I arrived because my head was full of other things."

He went to the boy and raised him in his arms, and pinched his cheek, and patted his hair and kissed him.

"Thank you," said Bramwell. "I feel new blood in my veins and new brains in my head, and a new heart in my body. I intend giving up dreaming for ever. I am now going to try to make a little money. Presently the child will have to be sent to school—to a good school, of course."

"My dear Frank," cried Philip, with tears in his eyes and voice, "it is better

to listen to you talk in this way than to hear you had been made a king."

"I am a king," cried the father in a tone of exultation. "I am an absolute monarch. I reign with undisputed sway over my island home, and my subject is my own son, whom I may mould and fashion as I please, and whom no one will teach to despise me."

END OF VOL I

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